

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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QUESTIONNAIRE: THE COST OF LETTERS

A LIFE IN BRIEF. BY HERMANN HESSE

AUBREY BEARDSLEY. BY ROBIN IRONSIDE

POEMS. BY ERNEST M. FROST AND DONAGH MACDONAGH

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CHATTO & WINDUS

# HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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ERNEST M. FROST  
ISLE OF SHEPPEY

Gantries and dead grass fix the sun on a skewer  
and the glutinous inlets of the black salt water  
glisten with rainbows of the oily machinery  
standing like Victorian bathers knee-deep in despair.

The sheep scatter when the mad-eyed dog is flung  
from the nettles by the outcropped cottages.  
The mineral-water factory repeats in the summer heat  
the revision of hours on islands. Then the sea jangles

from behind a brick cliff, and the eye spouts clear streams  
to where the delicate monsters walk on the estuary  
and roar in semaphore, winking with the small eyes of beasts  
caught in a hole. From years ago some camouflage

fumbles along a promenade, and the tethered goat  
snarls, for this is goat-kingdom, and this is the country  
where a closet flush of light illumines tired  
tied and trivial torment. O with what swollen tongues

the rusty Thames talks at the shore's edge, where the poor  
are poorer than the dried and sun-drunk land. Then night  
knuckles the marsh and snoring of wet frogs, and limps  
away to Kent on the mosquito's sail. And secretly

strange lights settle in sad acceptance on the creeks  
which this corroded hinterland resolves into the dream  
of a dead fair face splayed out beneath the moon,  
and the North Sea, let loose, booms on the stacked corn.

DONAGH MACDONAGH  
BRIDÍN VESEY  
(AFTER THE IRISH)

I would marry Bridín Vesey  
Without a shoe or petticoat,  
A comb, a cloak or dowry  
Or even one clean shift;  
Yes, and I'd make novena  
Or imitate the hermits  
Who spend their lives in fasting  
All for a Christmas gift.  
O cheek like dogwood fruiting,  
O cuckoo of the mountain  
I would send darkness packing  
If you would rise and go  
Against the ban of clergy  
And the sour lips of your parents  
And take me at an altar-stone  
In spite of all Mayo.

That was the sullen morning  
They told the cruel story  
How scorning word or token  
You rose and went away,  
'Twas then my hands remembered,  
My ears still heard you calling,  
I smelt the gorse and heather  
Where you first learned to pray.  
What could they know, who named you,  
Of jug and bed and table,  
Hours slipping through our fingers,  
Time banished from the room?  
Or what of all the secrets  
We knew among the rushes  
Under the Reek when cuckoos  
Brightened against the moon.  
You are my first and last song,  
The harp that lilts my fingers,  
Your lips like frozen honey,  
Eyes like the mountain pool,

Shaped like the Reek your breast is,  
Whiter than milk from Nephin,  
And he who never saw you  
Has lived and died a fool.  
Oh, gone across the mearing  
Dividing hope from sadness  
What happy townland holds you?  
In what county do you reign?  
In spite of all the grinning lads  
At corner and in haybarn  
I'll search all Ireland over  
And bring you home again.

## COMMENT

IN this number, with an inquiry into the fundamental economic problem of contemporary writers, we continue the diagnosis of the disease of our culture which we christened 'Inflationary Decadence'.

The questionnaire which follows was sent out to a selection of writers of various types and ages. As nearly all the replies were too long we had to eliminate several by drawing lots and we apologise to writers who have thus suffered. For one reason or another about half a dozen of the most successful novelists whom we circulated could not reply, so that this point of view, so rewarding to others, is insufficiently represented. Besides the well-established, we have tried also to include some young writers who are just beginning to tackle the problem in all its enormity.

Naturally, many other factors besides the economic are responsible, some of which we hope to investigate in future numbers, but out of these varied replies the following picture emerges clearly: (1) writers do not wish to live more simply than members of any other profession; (2) the rewards of literature (as opposed to those of journalism) have not been increased to cover the added expense of living. Writers are, therefore, forced into secondary occupations which soon tend to become primary; (3) with the decline of private incomes and private patrons, the State must do more to help writers, preferably by indirect subsidy. This will not come to pass without much persuasion from the writers themselves, many of whom disapprove of the State and show no inclination to influence it.

# QUESTIONNAIRE: THE COST OF LETTERS

1. How much do you think a writer needs to live on?
2. Do you think a serious writer can earn this sum by his writing, and if so, how?
3. If not, what do you think is the most suitable second occupation for him?
4. Do you think literature suffers from the diversion of a writer's energy into other employments or is enriched by it?
5. Do you think the State or any other institution should do more for writers?
6. Are you satisfied with your own solution of the problem and have you any specific advice to give to young people who wish to earn their living by writing?

★ ★ ★

## J. BETJEMAN

1. As much as anyone else.
2. No person requiring intoxicating drinks, cigarettes, visits to cinemas and theatres and food above British Restaurant standard can afford to live by writing prose if he is not 'established'. Not even a *popular* poet, if there is one, can live by his poetry.
3. I can speak only for myself. I would like to be a station-master on a small country branch line (single track).
4. I do not know.
5. The State cannot possibly help a creative writer since, properly viewed, a writer is as much part of the State as a Civil Servant. You are therefore asking should a writer do more for *himself*? A Government Office certainly cannot help since it is concerned, or should be concerned, with making living conditions tolerable, with giving us enough to eat, proper roads and drains and heat and light and arranging wars for us when our existence is threatened from outside. A few writers find their inspiration in writing about politics—most of them write vilely—but I would have thought the subject-matter of a writer is irrelevant to this question. I do not see why writers, as much as

school-teachers or manual workers, should not be entitled to a State pension when their powers are over. As it is, they are subject to the publicity and niggardliness of the Civil List. A decent pension should be the limit of help from a Government Office.

The Society of Authors might arrange that when the State approaches a writer to write something, the State should offer a fee commensurate with a generous periodical instead of apologizing for the lowness of the fee and excusing it on the grounds that it is Government work.

6. No. Who is? But if someone is born to be a writer nothing will prevent his writing. Perhaps the bitter tests of today are a good thing. But you need great strength of character. At all costs avoid an advertising agency where you will either have to write lies or embellish facts in which you are not interested; such work is of the devil. Journalism is a better way out for weak characters, such as I am, who are slaves to nicotine and drink. It teaches you to write shortly and clearly. It allows you to say what you think—at least reputable journalism does. It forbids you to be a bore.

But because I believe that there is such a thing as a balance between mental work and manual work and because I believe that in Britain today people are subjected to too much of one or too much of the other, I would advise a young writer to equip himself for manual work which he thinks he will enjoy. It is pretty certain to be better paid than is writing in its initial stages. If I had my life over again, I think I would take up some handicraft—making stained glass or weaving or french polishing or woodcarving—and with this to fall back on and to content the manual side of me without destroying my soul, I would be refreshed and confident when I wrote. But I would have taken it on such work with writing as my chief aim. I would have taken it on in self-defence because I knew I must write and that God had called me to be a writer, but demanded that I do my quota of work with my hands.

### *ELIZABETH BOWEN*

1. I should say that, as in the case of any other kind of person, this depends on his liabilities and his temperament. In my own case, I should like to have £3,500 a year net.

2. I should say that, with *all* past books in print and steady production still going on, a writer, if his or her name is still of value, should be able to command two-thirds of the sum I have named by the time he or she is 60 or 65.

3. I should say in a man's case a suitable second occupation would be either medicine, architecture or law. Very few women would have time to carry on two professions simultaneously as their personal life and domestic responsibilities take up a good deal of time in themselves.

4. I should think that a writer's writing would be improved by any activity that brought him into company with other than that of his fellow writers. Literary sequestration, which seems to be increasing, is most unfortunate. On the other hand, the diversion of energy is a danger. If a writer is doing two things at the same time he is likely to have more to write *about*, but runs the risk of writing with less high concentration and singleness of mind.

5. I find this difficult to answer, as I am not clear how much the State does already. Writers who have worked hard and shown distinction (in any field, or of any kind) should certainly be entitled to some help, or even a degree of support, in the case of illness or old age. And, equally, some sense of responsibility should be felt by the public towards the dependants (young children, etc.) of such writers. As far as I know, an extension of the Literary Fund, and possibly a contribution to this from the State, should meet the purpose.

6. I doubt if one ever does arrive at a specific solution of the problem—it is a matter of getting along from year to year. My advice to young people who wish to earn their living by writing would be to go at it slowly, with infinite trouble, not burn any boats in the way of other support behind them, and not either expect or play for quick returns.

### ALEX COMFORT

1. I cannot lay down an income scale for 'writers', as if they were a race apart from anyone else. I live on a combined income of about £500 per annum, with a wife, and one child expected.

2. In other words, can a writer who conscientiously produces work he considers artistically worth while live on the proceeds

of it? Yes, obviously he can, if he happens to write in one of the genres or styles which are commercially subsidized, but in the present world it seems to me highly inadvisable for him to do so. It means that one has to impose some sort of quota in order to live comfortably; it renders one dependent on the phases of an opinion which one ought to be forming, not obeying, and it continually dangles the temptation of subsidy-conditional-on-conforming under one's nose. I would not try to live entirely upon literary work myself, even though at the moment I probably could get paid for everything I write without being obliged to alter it. The writers who are working experimentally, or in forms such as lyrical poetry, would be quite unable to live out of their work, if only because of the relatively small volume which can be produced by one man. I have no sympathy with the Chatterton-Rimbaud fairy stories which lead writers to starve in garrets, or, the more modern equivalent, sponge on non-literary friends, because they are poets and find work too mundane. Artists are not privileged people—art is probably the human activity most deeply dependent on a responsible attitude to other people.

3. This depends upon the attitude which you adopt towards life. I believe that the most consistent and factually justifiable attitude towards life and art is Romanticism, by which I mean a philosophy based upon two postulates—that Man individually and collectively is engaged in continual conflict to assert the standards, beauty, justice, and so on, which are the product of his own consciousness, against an inert universe and a hostile environment, on the one hand, and power on the other: and that by reason of this conflict we have a definite, inescapable duty and responsibility towards all other human beings. We are afloat on a raft in a sea of mindlessness—our cargo includes all the things which consciousness regards as valuable, and there are one or two people on board who have lost their heads and are busier trying to assert their own authority than working to keep the raft afloat. We have to fight them with one hand and the elements with the other. The two fights are part of one single conflict, and for me art is the name we give to the struggle for spiritual survival and science (the genuine article, not the kitsch variety) the fight against death and our environment. One can add revolution, the fight against the human allies of the dead

environment. That is why I regard scientific activity as fully continuous with artistic activity—I don't know where one stops and the next starts. I do not suggest that all artists should try to become research workers, but I think that their second occupation should be one which bears some relation to the general effort of Man, which I call mutual aid.

4, 5, 6. My answers follow from what I have said. Non-literary activity always enriches creation subject to my provisos. As to the State, since one of the major battles of the sane man in the present period is against obedience, an enemy second only to death, I don't think the artist should touch the State or its money with a barge-pole. The same applies to commercial patronage, increasingly, from day to day. In a period of barbarism one has to be able to cut oneself off from all patronage—put yourself in the place of the European underground writers, and remember that the responsible human being is a member of a permanent underground movement who must be ready to carry on his work in the devastated landscape of the next hundred years.

6. Yes, entirely satisfied. What I have written here and elsewhere about this question is the only advice I have to offer. It boils down to this—be human, fight death and obedience, work like anyone else, since that is part of humanness, despise kiss-breeches and collaborators, and produce the work which you feel compatible with these ideas.

For your information, my own non-literary posts at the moment are M.O. in a Borough Children's Clinic and research assistant at a hospital. I am paid for the first, but not the second.

### CYRIL CONNOLLY

1. If he is to enjoy leisure and privacy, marry, buy books, travel and entertain his friends, a writer needs upwards of five pounds a day net. If he is prepared to die young of syphilis for the sake of an adjective he can make do on under.

2. He can only earn the larger sum if he writes a novel, play, or short story, which is bought by Hollywood and/or chosen by one of the American book societies, but he can add considerably to his income if he tries to publish everything he writes simultaneously in American periodicals, who all pay most handsomely. This is the only dignified way of making more money without giving up more time.

## 3. A rich wife.

4. If you substitute 'painting' for 'literature', it becomes obvious that no art can be enriched by the diversion of an artist's energy. A good book is the end-product of an obsession; everything which impedes the growth and final exorcism of this obsession is harmful. All writers like to have hobbies and side interests to fill up the interval between obsessions, but this is not the same as having other employment. Compare Pope with Gray, Tennyson with Arnold, Baudelaire with Merimée, Yeats with Housman. Pope and Yeats *grew*, the two dons, despite their long holidays, remained stationary.

5. The State, in so far as it supplants private enterprise, *must* supplant private patronage. But private patronage was not based on results, and the State should not count on them either. Free gifts of money should be made to those setting out on an artistic career, and at intervals of seven years, to those who persist in one. Most of our good writers need at the moment a year's holiday with pay. Furthermore, pensions to artists and their widows should be trebled, both in value and quantity, and considered an honour, not a disgrace. All State-conferred honours to artists should be accompanied by a cash award. Furthermore, all writers and painters should be allowed a fairly large entertainment allowance, free of tax, and one annual tax-free trip abroad. Books and framed paintings (as opposed to articles, sketches, posters, etc.) should be regarded as capital and the income from them not taxed. This would encourage the production of books rather than the better-paid journalism by which most writers now make their living. Money spent on buying books and works of art by living artists should also be tax-free. Big Business, too, could do much more for writers and painters. Shell and London Transport before the war were setting the example. Even the general public can send fruit and eggs. The State's attitude towards the artist should be to provide *luxe, calme et volupté*, and when it receives *ordre et beauté* in return, to be sure to recognize it.

6. No, certainly not. What a question! As for the young, don't become writers unless you feel you must, and unless you can contemplate the happiness, security and cosiness of respectable State-employed people without loneliness or envy. Otherwise, like most of us, you will resemble the American 'who wanted to be a poet and ended up as a man with seven jobs'.

*C. DAY LEWIS.*

I could not generalize about any of these questions. Ideal thing, for most writers: a private income—small enough not to encourage laziness or dilettantism, large enough to relieve the worries, obsessions and grosser expedients of poverty, say £150 to £300 a year. Failing this, should a young writer make his basic income from (a) literary hack-work or (b) a second occupation? Depends so much upon the individual. Advantage of (a) is that it has (or can have) some relation to his serious work, something to do with words and ideas and even with the imagination; and one only learns how to write by writing—and 'hack' writing has its discipline, its opportunities to shirk, to twist, or to be honest and careful, just as does 'serious' writing: serious writing, in one sense, is any writing you take seriously. Advantage of (b), for the beginner at any rate, is that it is the best way for him to find out whether he is really meant to be a writer: if he is not, the interest of the second occupation will soon overshadow the interest of writing; and he will have made a start with this other profession, instead of having to start again from scratch. The most suitable second occupation for a serious writer? A routine job, with regular hours, spare time, and (particularly if he is a novelist) one which brings him much into contact with people: for the novelist, who needs a wide range and diversity of personal contacts, medicine, the law, or commercial travelling might be recommended: for the poet, in so far as he needs a deeper, narrower experience, the instinctive kind of human relationship which comes from working with other people is perhaps best—the relationship of a Civil Servant, a schoolmaster, or for that matter a soldier or a miner, with his colleagues. The poet is a special case, anyway: other serious writers can, with luck, and without loss of integrity, make a living from their writing when established; the poet cannot, by his poetry alone. Ideally, he should arrange his life more regularly than the novelist: there is a systole and diastole in his creative workings, and his life should be adapted to these—a period of taking in followed by a period of giving out. He, if any writer, should receive support from the State; for, on the whole, his writing will be apt to suffer more than others' from diversion of his energy either into hack writing or a second employment: but State support should involve him

n no obligations except to his poetry; therefore it would best come from some non-political organization such as the Arts Council. On the other hand, since friction stimulates, no writer should have things made too easy for him, materially, morally, psychologically: a smooth, cosy life in the bosom of the State, or the intelligentsia, will not do: it is in his struggle with the ordinary business of living, even more than in his struggle with problems of technique, that the writer finds his own level of seriousness.

### ROBERT GRAVES

1, 2, 3. 'Serious writer' was, I think, a term invented by the young experimental writers of the 'twenties to distinguish themselves from the commercial, academic, and elder writers whom they lumped together as their common enemies. But if HORIZON is using the word in a less provocative sense, it includes such different types as the modern novelist who writes for entertainment but not according to a commercially dictated formula, the literary historian, and the poet.

Novel writing is not an all-time job, and there is nothing against a novelist having a secondary profession if he does not happen to have inherited, or married, money. Fielding was a police magistrate, Trollope a post office official, and for contemporary instances consult *Who's Who*.

The literary historian requires whatever it needs to live in a University society with ready access to specialist libraries and specialist colleagues. The snag is the difficulty of getting a salaried post that does not involve so much routine teaching that he cannot get on with his real work.

To be a poet is a condition rather than a profession. He requires whatever it needs to be completely his own master. This need not involve great expense—W. H. Davies solved the problem by being a professional tramp.

4. This is too broad a question for me to attempt an answer here.

5. Those who pay the piper call the tune. The State (or any State-sponsored institution) is a dangerous patron of literature.

6. Everyone has to solve the problem in his own way. First by deciding to what category of writers he belongs. Many begin as poets or experimental writers, and end as journalistic hacks. On

leaving the Army after the last war but one, I took a vow of poetic independence which I have kept ever since. The only job I took and held for a few months was that of Professor of English literature at Cairo University, but I was my own master, had only one hour a week lecturing, and resigned as soon as difficulties arose with my French and Belgian colleagues. That was twenty years ago, and I have lived ever since by writing biography and historical novels: a profession which I find more easily reconcilable than most with being a poet. Shakespeare himself admitted the difficulty of a secondary profession in his sonnet about the dyer's hand; and to say that I am satisfied with my solution would be indecent—it would imply a greater satisfaction with my work than Shakespeare seems to have felt with his.

As for advice, if the young writer really wants it: never write anything that you do not really want to write for its own sake, whatever the fee is. And if you have made no critical discovery about life or literature that you feel so important that you must write it down, putting everything else aside, in the most direct and careful language of which you are capable, then you are not a serious writer. Apply for a job with a newspaper, an advertising agency or the B.B.C. But if you are a serious writer and have no money, then live on your friends, relations or wits, until you can collect a public large enough to support you. (That took me twelve years.) If you must take a job, find one wholly unconnected with writing, leave it as soon as you are proficient in it, and either live on your friends again or take another quite different one.

I cannot answer the question in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, because I live abroad and, anyhow, never keep accounts, and have a large family to support.

### ROBIN IRONSIDE

As an aspiring critic, mainly of painting, I require, for the satisfaction of my aspirations and having due regard to the present cost of living, a net income of £15 a week, an amount I have never possessed and am never likely to possess. Because I am too poor, I have never been to Greece or to America; with £15 a week, I believe I could contrive to do so without great discomfort. The propriety, for a critic of fine art, of a visit to Greece, is obvious;

nor is it possible to speak with any real authority on important aspects of French painting without some acquaintance with collections in the U.S. Such visits, even with the income I have proposed, would be exceptions to be paid for out of savings. But I should be able, without practising extreme thrift at home, to make brief annual excursions to France and Italy, and to visit any exhibitions, houses or museums, in the United Kingdom. Without these facilities, an aptitude for art criticism cannot adequately develop.

I regard £15 a week as a reasonable minimum, not as a bare minimum, and emphatically not as an optimum amount. Such qualities as my writings may already possess would improve as my income grew larger. I should be more diligent if I could work in a beautifully furnished room, if I could buy the books I wanted, if I could offer good food and wine to my friends, if I could be conveyed from place to place in a car, etc., etc. I am prepared to listen to people who tell me that there is a point at which money becomes a burden. But I do not really believe them. I could most profitably spend £10,000 in five minutes at Christies; if I were excessively rich I would hand out the excess to others; if wealth is burden, it is a burden that is very easily removed.

Serious writers without private resources must necessarily make a living by some means or other. State patronage would be incompetent to deal with this difficulty. It is hard to imagine any scheme of Government support that would not, at some stage of its career, be exposed to the danger of passing a megaphone to the bad writers with one hand, while it silenced the good ones with the other. I believe that everyone interested in the prosperity of the arts should look to a general reduction of working hours. Humanity is only too conscious of its right to work; in fact, this 'right' is not a right at all, but a necessity; what we need is a recognition of our right to leisure. If the normal working day could be reduced say to four hours, the State could exercise its discretion in the matter of patronage with the certain knowledge that, however misjudged the distribution of its benefits, anyone wishing to write would at least have some time in which to prove his abilities; and time, of course, is even more necessary to a writer than a satisfactory income. I am aware that a general reduction of working hours is not immediately realizable. But it is an ideal that requires, like other ideals, to be acclaimed and pursued now,

if it is ever to be achieved in the future; and I am led to suppose (perhaps mistakenly) by the pronouncements of scientists and economists that its achievement, in a world at peace, need not be regarded as a remote or Utopian eventuality.

I am not satisfied with my own solution of the problem. I have, for a writer on art, the apparent good fortune to be employed at the Tate Gallery. But the administrative needs of this very important but unhappy institution are such that, within its doors, I must largely renounce the pursuit of knowledge and that official occasions for enlarging my appreciations elsewhere hardly, if ever, occur. It is a situation that must frustrate more than it can assist any ambition to qualify fully as an art critic.<sup>1</sup> If I possessed a private income of even £5 a week or a capital sum of £1,000, I would resign in the brave but slender hope that additional sums earned by writing and painting would provide a tolerable life for a substantial period of time.

Since I do not believe it is possible to make a living by writing criticism, I have no advice to offer to young people who wish to do so. I should be ashamed to dissuade and afraid to encourage them.

### ROBERT KEE<sup>2</sup>

There is something inside all artists which remains themselves whatever happens, and this has nothing to do with income unless income is so low that they have neither time nor energy to be themselves.

The trouble is that few writers can be certain of obtaining regularly from their writings even the £400 a year which I regard as necessary to supply the time and energy with which to write. They have to turn to bureaucracy or journalism or some other activity which demands allegiance to society and thereby castrates them as writers. However, if there is no other way for a writer to get his £400 a year, a part-time extra job is at least preferable to a full-time one. And as a writer's business is to do with words it is obviously more sensible for him to turn to some form of word-using rather than to glass-blowing or road-making. But let him

<sup>1</sup> Adoption of the improvements recommended by the Massey Committee on the National and Tate Galleries would in great measure invalidate these observations.

<sup>2</sup> Winner of one of the recent Atlantic Awards.

be quite clear about what he is doing. There should be no attempt to compromise between money-earning and writing. There are already too many writers who, in the higher forms of intellectual and literary journalism, have lost sight of their real work. The principle should be: the easier the money, the more suitable the second occupation. If a writer cannot find enough to write about in what goes on all round him, without being 'enriched' by other employments, he might as well give up being a writer altogether.

But the idea of a writer having to descend to tricks to be able to follow his trade is unpleasant, and the society which tolerates it is being short sighted merely because it means that so much less serious writing will be done. How then is a writer to get his £400 a year? I suppose publishers could be made to surrender a great deal more of it than they do at the moment. The present relationship between writer and publisher seems as absurd as if a man were to be paid pocket-money by his butler. But this is really irrelevant because even if publishers did pay fairly it would not help the writer who produces little or who is not in sympathy with his time.

Therefore the State, as the instrument of society, should make £400 a year available to anyone who wants to be a writer. This would be renewable every year at the option of the writer. The only condition would be that no other employment could be taken during that year. There would be few abuses of this system. £400 a year is not enough to tempt the crook. Moreover, any charlatan who had no intention of writing would get so bored with nothing to do on so little money that he would be eager to escape at the end of the year. Admittedly some appalling writers would be given a chance but, regarded as experimental waste, this would be a minor drawback. We are prepared to tolerate several million pounds-worth of experimental waste to produce a new atom bomb. Surely we could afford a few thousands to produce a new writer?

This £400 a year would in no way be an attempt to reward the writer for what he does. It would merely make it possible for him to write. The writer should be paid for what he is, not what he does. However, the State should also see that those writers who do produce something are more suitably rewarded than at present. No income tax should be payable on income derived from writing, though it would be payable on the basic £400. A

considerable sum—say, the cost of about one afternoon at war—should be set aside every year to be distributed as prizes for poems, novels, criticism, editorship, etc. And if anyone thinks that this State interest in literature would lead to the same results as in the totalitarian countries, I would say that our literatures would resemble each other just about as much as our State legal systems do at present.

In answer to your last question I can only say that I now enjoy £250 tax-free for one year on similar conditions to those which I have suggested. In so far as this is not £6 a week and will not continue after the end of the year, I am dissatisfied. In so far as it does give me a chance to write, I realise that I am more lucky than many writers who have already produced distinguished work.

### LAURIE LEE

The commodity most necessary to the writer is not money at all, but time. The writer needs guaranteed time, long avenues of it stretching far away before him, free from congestion, side-tracks or concealed entrances. For ignoring the occasional lyric cart-wheel, which covers no more than a moment of paper, serious writing is one of the most pedestrian occupations that exists.

I think few serious writers can earn this necessary time, legitimately, by the sort of writing they most wish to do. There are always the speed-kings, of course, but they pay heavily with blurred and half-seen images and phrases mutilated by the wind. A writer needs time to pause, to explore, to cultivate in detail the prospect before him. He needs to take time, and having taken it, to consume it in his own time.

But who among us is free to do this? Look at the panting cross-country novelists. Look at the six-day-bicycle-riding script writers, struggling at poems while changing tyres. Their doom is in the pace and the payout; they are paid off by the number of milestones they cover, and not by their discoveries of the country in between. These are the things which break their hearts and wind.

Old-day patronage was in many ways evil, but at least it gave the artist time without tears. Its modern counterpart—State or commercial sponsorship in their present forms—is a great deal worse, for this, geared to the speed-neurosis of industry, induces

in the writer all the jumping-jack hysteria of the factory-worker faced with the dictatorship of the moving belt.

What are the present alternatives? A he-man's job as wood-cutter or crane-driver, with a couple of hours writing in the evenings? Romantic fallacy! The body's exhaustion is also the mind's. A State job, then—Ministry propagandist or B.B.C. hack? No; they fritter and stale like nobody's business.

What then? A State pension for all writers, with no questions asked? Not altogether; but that is more like it. Hardship and near-starvation are not bad for the young: they force the broader view, they stimulate, they atomize the coral-coasted island; they give birth to thoroughbreds of sublimation out of frustration. Let younger writers first serve this apprenticeship, and show something for it. Then, when they have passed the test, let the State provide them with sufficient pasture to live on, a free hand, and a bonus for special achievements. But do not let this be free altogether from the demands of commission. A fat pension, with no provisos, only encourages fatness; but extra sugar for spectacular leaps will keep the beasts in condition.

As to a present personal solution of the problem: my own serves me well enough, but I cannot say it would serve others. My rules are these: To avoid as far as possible the dissipation of regular work for others. Never to despise a commission unless I dislike it. Shelve any commission whenever the compulsion to do private work arises. But generally I welcome the rewards of scattered commissions; the discipline involved often provides channels for genuine personal expression. Anyway, I like writing for a waiting audience; and ever since my schooldays I have enjoyed making poems to a set subject. I only wish publishers and editors would issue that kind of challenge more often. Records are never broken except on a set course.

### ROSE MACAULAY

There can't be any general rule as to how much a writer needs to live on. But whatever it is, it is very unlikely that he will earn it at all early in his career, unless he happens to make a lucky hit, get chosen by book societies in this and other countries, perhaps even get filmed. The ordinary young writer, whether serious or not, must depend on something else for some years. If he (or she) has good-natured and

moderately well-off parents, they may consent to keep him (or, more likely, her) till he finds his feet, or, alternatively, finds that he had better adopt another career. If the parents refuse this burden, as well they may, and if there are no other means of support, the young writer should enter some profession, the less exacting the better. If possible, he should choose a job that does not run counter to and stultify his creative instincts; either purely mechanical or physical work, whose hang-over would not impinge on his leisure, but which he could forget entirely when he laid down his tools each day and turned to his writing; or work that ministered to his imagination. It might be useful to get a job abroad for a time. Southey had a notion that he would be happy and fruitful if only he could get the consulship at Lisbon — "Tis a good thousand a year" — though as a matter of fact the Lisbon consuls have always been busier than he supposed, and have had little time for literary pursuits. On the other hand, diplomats, whether ambassadors or holding some lesser post in a legation, have often written a great deal. Councillors and First Secretaries have been eloquent, and chancelleries have been nests of singing-birds or of experimenters in prose. But diplomacy, of course, is out of the reach of most young writers; it is a profession approached over stiff hurdles. Easier to be a tourist agent abroad (if you know any languages), or get a job in a café or a foreign bank or firm. That way, the writer will see life a little, which should be good for him. Much better not enter an intellectual profession, such as the law, medicine, or teaching, which will absorb his mind. In former times, the country parson's was often a life which gave scope for literature and scholarship; the fact that this is seldom now the case may indicate the decline of intellectual quality among clergymen. The number of our clerical authors in the past—and down almost to the present generation—is greater than in any other one profession; the quality of their work perhaps higher. However, if the writer succeeds in finding the job to suit him—preferably a series of jobs—his professional work should enrich his talent.

The State might well consider helping young writers with temporary maintenance. 'Let there be patrons,' as Herrick (himself patroned by Emmanuel Porter) urged in moving verse. Patrons have gone out; the State might do something to fill the gap. There might be a committee for the purpose of selecting

worthy candidates. As no one can tell at first whether a serious writer is a bad serious writer or a good one, a few risks would have to be taken, and a few bad writers helped, as they were often helped by patrons of old. This does no great harm; better that than good young men and women should be forced to earn their daily bread by work that uses up all their energies and stultifies their talent. All the same, writers should be ready to live a little hard; to travel cheaply if at all, to eat and drink simply. They had better not be in a hurry to get married; this leads to expense, and, if they are young women, to devastating distraction of energy. (Unless, of course, they manage to marry money, which solves the problem at once.)

### *J. MACLAREN-ROSS*

Your questionnaire arrived at an opportune moment, when I was at my wits end to know which way to turn for money. This situation is always arising with me. Hence, my answer to your first question is: A writer needs all he can lay his hands on in order to keep alive.

How much he actually should have depends on the writer himself: his tastes and habits. In other words, he should be able to live comfortably, in a style that suits his temperament. If he is a drinker he shouldn't have to worry whether he drinks beer or spirits or wine, though he shouldn't necessarily have enough to get sozzled every night. If he is a smoker he shouldn't have to buy Woodbines if he prefers Perfectos. If he wants to buy a book he should be able to buy it, not wait until it is sent to him for review or lent to him by a friend. If he doesn't drink, smoke, read books or go to the cinema, then he almost certainly has other vices, or else a wife or mistress to spend money on; well, he should have enough to spend. A writer's standard of living should be at the least as high as that of a solicitor, or any other professional man.

I am a metropolitan man and I need a minimum of £20 a week to live on, given the present cost of living; and that's *not* including rent. Whether I get it or not is another matter.

Which brings me to your second question: How can a serious writer earn this sum by writing? It's very difficult. Suppose, like myself at the moment, you have written short stories but now

want to write novels. How do you raise the sum of money needed to sit down and concentrate on writing a novel in moderate peace of mind? You can't do it except by more short stories, radio plays, or what have you, the writing of which takes up most of your time and vitiates your energy. So the novel doesn't get written, that's all.

Suppose, however, you are fortunate enough to obtain an advance of £300, you certainly spend more than that while writing the book, so you're no better off; in these days of small editions and reprints at long intervals, your advance almost covers the total royalties on your sales. Then there is the interval between delivery of MS. and the appearance of the book: nine months to a year if you are lucky, three years if you are not, as in one case I know. After that there is a further period until statements of sales go through and royalties are paid up; any attempt to obtain money in between is regarded by the publisher as an imposition, or, if he doles out some small sum, as an act of charity.

Besides, advances are rarely anything like £300. They are more likely to be, at the most, £75 or £100. The *Artists' and Writers' Year Book* is still talking about £25 as a suitable advance, 'but only in rare cases can publishers be made to see this'.

Therefore a novelist is supposed to spend six months writing his book and then live for a further eighteen months or so on his advance—about £100. Plainly impossible, with the present cost of living, even for a man of the most spartan tastes.

Publishers should be made to acknowledge the higher cost of living and to pay advances in proportion; a minimum of £300 should be forced upon them, and even that will not keep anyone for eighteen months. The rates paid by editors for poems, articles, stories, are far higher now than they were before the war. Why haven't publishers raised their rates accordingly?

Until they do, the writer is compelled to exist by means, in my opinion, detrimental to his serious work. In many occupations, like film-script writing, the B.B.C., etc., he has neither the leisure nor the energy, when the day's dull work is done, to settle to what he really wants to do. I don't think there can possibly be any occupations suitable to the writer other than that of writing what he wants when he wants and of being well paid for doing so.

I don't think, either, that the State or any other institution

should support writers. Such a state of affairs would inevitably lead to limitation or control of subject-matter and theme. It is the publishers and editors, who make money and reputation out of printing writers, who should do more for the people on whose work they in turn depend for their living.

But this solution to the problem does not satisfy me, since I see no hope of the present vicious system being altered; and if I have advice to give to anyone who wants to write for a living, it is this:

(a) Don't attempt it.

(b) If you are crazy enough to try, be tough; get all you can. Price your work high and make them pay. Don't listen to your publisher's sob-stories about how little he can afford. He'll have a country house and polo ponies when you are still borrowing the price of a drink in Fitzrovia. Remember, *he* makes the money; make him give you as much as you can extort, short of using a gun or pincers. Art for art's sake is all cock, anyway.

And by the same token, please pay promptly for this contribution, because I am broke.

### GEORGE ORWELL

1. At the present purchasing value of money, I think £10 a week after payment of income tax is a minimum for a married man, and perhaps £6 a week for an unmarried man. The *best* income for a writer, I should say—again at the present value of money—is about £1,000 a year. With that he can live in reasonable comfort, free from duns and the necessity to do hackwork, without having the feeling that he has definitely moved into the privileged class. I do not think one can with justice expect a writer to do his best on a working-class income. His first necessity, just as indispensable to him as are tools to a carpenter, is a comfortable, well-warmed room where he can be sure of not being interrupted; and, although this does not sound much, if one works out what it means in terms of domestic arrangements, it implies fairly large earnings. A writer's work is done at home, and if he lets it happen he will be subjected to almost constant interruption. To be protected against interruption always costs money, directly or indirectly. Then again, writers need books and periodicals in great numbers, they need space and furniture for filing papers, they spend a great deal on

correspondence, they need at any rate part-time secretarial help, and most of them probably benefit by travelling, by living in what they consider sympathetic surroundings, and by eating and drinking the things they like best and by being able to take their friends out to meals or have them to stay. It all costs money. Ideally I would like to see every human being have the same income, provided that it were a fairly high income: but so long as there is to be differentiation, I think the writer's place is in the middle bracket, which means, at present standards, round about £1,000 a year.

2. No. I am told that at most a few hundred people in Great Britain earn their living solely by writing books, and most of those are probably writers of detective stories, etc. In a way it is easier for people like Ethel M. Dell to avoid prostitution than it is for a serious writer.

3. If it can be so arranged as not to take up the whole of his time, I think a writer's second occupation should be something non-literary. I suppose it would be better if it were also something congenial. But I can just imagine, for instance, a bank clerk or an insurance agent going home and doing serious work in his evenings; whereas the effort is too much to make if one has already squandered one's energies on semi-creative work such as teaching, broadcasting or composing propaganda for bodies such as the British Council.

4. Provided one's whole time and energies are not used up, I think it benefits. After all, one must make some sort of contact with the ordinary world. Otherwise, what is one to write about?

5. The only thing the State could usefully do is to divert more of the public money into buying books for the public libraries. If we are to have full Socialism, then clearly the writer must be State-supported, and ought to be placed among the better-paid groups. But so long as we have an economy like the present one, in which there is a great deal of State enterprise but also large areas of private capitalism, then the less truck a writer has with the State, or any other organized body, the better for him and his work. There are invariably strings tied to any kind of organized patronage. On the other hand, the old kind of private patronage, in which the writer is in effect the dependant of some individual rich man, is obviously undesirable. By far the best and least exacting patron is the big public. Unfortunately the British public

won't at present spend money on books, although it reads more and more and its average of taste, I should say, has risen greatly in the last twenty years. At present, I believe, the average British citizen spends round about £1 a year on books, whereas he spends getting on for £25 on tobacco and alcohol combined. Via the rates and taxes he could easily be made to spend more without even knowing it—as, during the war years, he spent far more than usual on radio, owing to the subsidizing of the B.B.C. by the Treasury. If the Government could be induced simply to earmark larger sums for the purchase of books, without in the process taking over the whole book trade and turning it into a propaganda machine, I think the writer's position would be eased and literature might also benefit.

6. Personally I am satisfied, i.e. in a financial sense, because I have been lucky, at any rate during the last few years. I had to struggle desperately at the beginning, and if I had listened to what people said to me I would never have been a writer. Even until quite recently, whenever I have written anything which I took seriously, there have been strenuous efforts, sometimes by quite influential people, to keep it out of print. To a young writer who is conscious of having something in him, the only advice I can give is not to take advice. Financially, of course, there are tips I could give, but even those are of no use unless one has some kind of talent. If one simply wants to make a living by putting words on paper, then the B.B.C., the film companies, and the like are reasonably helpful. But if one wants to be primarily a *writer*, then, in our society, one is an animal that is tolerated but not encouraged—something rather like a house sparrow—and one gets on better if one realizes one's position from the start.

### V. S. PRITCHETT

1. Before the war I remember J. Middleton Murry held that a writer could honestly earn about £400 a year. Aldous Huxley estimated the need at about £700. The post-war equivalent would be about £1,200 to £1,400 gross.

2. A vastly successful novelist, playwright, etc., can, of course, earn much more. But the promising, the rising, the merely successful, cannot earn anything like the above sums, by writing books or serious criticism or good short stories or poems, alone. The good creative writer will have to supplement his income

from journalism, broadcasting, publishers' reading, editorial work, some other job—or a private income.

3. Any secondary work.

4. But it is essential that it should take up very little time and energy. This hardly ever happens, and the result is an evident decline in the quality of creative literature. The writers are worn out, overworked; they are not worn out by creation but by the various grindstones by which they earn the major part of their living. I would say that up to the age of thirty it does not matter what a writer does with his time. An outside job may be valuable. After thirty, the outside job is inevitable in our high-costing, highly taxed society, where the private income is vanishing—inevitable, and in the long run fatal.

5. The question really amounts to this: should the State replace the support given by sinecures and the private income? No. State writers are bought and censored writers. I am against writers' co-operatives. I am in favour of the people who now have the large private fortunes being obliged, by the State, to support literature. These private fortunes are not in private hands. They are in the hands of the Boards, the shareholders of the great industrial firms. Shell-Mex, Unilever, London Transport, etc., should be obliged to give patronage—but not in return for publicity.

6. Advice to a young writer: discipline yourself to the *habit* of writing. Write every day. Keep office hours. Inspiration comes from the grindstone, not from heaven. Do not hope to move up from popular writing to more distinguished levels. Popular journalism corrupts very quickly. Write for yourself alone as long as you can; the conditions of the profession will gradually vitiate the highest standards. The failures of overwork are fewer than the failures of idleness. Move heaven and earth to get time, and put time before money whenever you can. Be born with a small private income; or get yourself supported by a husband or wife.

### *HERBERT READ*

1. How much a writer needs to live on will depend on his personal appetites, but if he is married, has two or three children, likes decent food and a comfortable house, he will need with present costs at least £1,000 a year.

2. A serious writer cannot possibly earn this sum by writing.

A serious book takes two or three years to write. To earn the necessary sum by book royalties, he would have to sell between thirty and fifty thousand copies of each book: in all probability he will sell only three to five thousand copies.

3. The most suitable second occupation for him is one which is no drain on either his intellectual or physical energy. 'A nice job in a museum', jobs in publishers' offices and cultural organizations like the British Council and the B.B.C., are the worst possible kinds of occupation. They are too interesting: they overlap into his literary work. They create mental confusion and lead to all kinds of trivial activities which are intellectually exhausting and completely unremunerative.

Farming and small-holding, which have superficial attractions (especially for romantic writers) are physically far too exhausting. They drug the mental faculties with a poisonous fatigue.

The best kind of occupation is represented by Spinoza's lens-polishing. If I were beginning my life again, I should seek a job in the light engineering industry, especially one in which, by piece-work, the necessary amount of work could be varied according to the needs of the moment.

4. The more a writer has experience of the normal activities of human beings, the better it is for his writing. I can think of no great writer in the past who has not benefited from non-intellectual activities. I can think of many whose work has suffered from academic or hedonistic seclusion.

5. No. The State can only demoralize and debase literature.

6. I am far from satisfied with my own solution of the problem. I have tried several solutions—Civil Servant, museum assistant, university professor, editor of a magazine, and now a publisher. They have all been unsatisfactory, for the reasons given in my answer to Question 3 above. They bristle with the 'grappling-irons' which Cézanne so rightly feared, and although a strong-minded individual might be able to avoid the public responsibilities which will eventually attach to eminence in such a position, nevertheless all such jobs are by their nature 'contact jobs', and whichever way one turns one meets the devouring pack—until in the end one is reduced to a condition of dazed indifference, the paralysis of the cornered animal.

My advice to young people who wish to earn their living by writing is at all costs to avoid following my example.

*HENRY REED*

I find it easier not to answer Question 1 first. Question 2: I believe that after three or four years of practice a writer who is willing to do subsidiary literary work should be able to keep himself by writing. The position of the poet and the novelist is much the same: both have to earn their leisure to write; I think it is best, for most writers, to earn it by subsidiary writing of a civilized type; this is often extremely helpful in loosening a writer's tongue. The avenues open are obvious: free-lance journalism (especially for the 'good' provincial daily papers); commissioned reviewing (which should not be difficult to get, since reviewers are always drifting *out of* it); broadcasting, and writing for broadcasting. After a time it is wiser for a writer to confine this honourable hack-work to commissioned work. There is less risk and more money in it. I think it bad for any writer to write down; I deplore the writer who, *without enjoying it*, writes low fiction (e.g. detective stories) or dance-lyrics in order to earn money. To do so is to give play to a cheap part of the mind (present in all writers, I suspect—cf. some of James's plays) of which a writer must, in fact, strive to rid himself. There is a danger—though clearly a decreasing one—in writing for films.

3. The trouble with most secondary jobs available to writers is that you often have to write as well in order to bring your income within bearable limits. The best job is teaching, because of its incomparable holidays. It is, however, a job very exhausting to the brain, the emotions, the throat and the legs; I have found that office-work is less tiring mentally and physically, but its hours often make work in the evening impossible. A university life is ostensibly ideal for writers; but here there is the grave disadvantage of your company; with angel-exceptions (some of whom I have met) the don is by nature prejudiced against the creative artist; in no profession is the belief more strongly held that all art *ceased* just before Mummy got married; there is a Freudian explanation of this, but it remains one of those obstinate psychological coggings which get round the bend where the brush cannot reach. Its atmosphere savages the soul. A disadvantage of *all* secondary jobs is that they are apt to become primary. This induces in a writer self-pity and lethargy, both fatal.

4. You have but to look round to see how badly 'literature' suffers from the diversion of a writer's energy elsewhere. Very serious writers do not let their knowledge of outside *milieux* intrude unduly in their work; but minor writers are not very strong-minded about this. On the other hand, think what we should miss if Melville had never gone whaling, or Joyce Cary never been in the African Service; note, however, that they both digested these experiences before writing of them, and that they are great enough writers to order their recondite experiences into art.

5. I believe emphatically in the value of State help, and help from other institutions who will be willing to risk no returns. But the funds should *not* be administered by the donating institution, least of all by the State. Artists—cf. the Soviet novelists and our own official War Artists—are only too ready to play the whore and the toady to any institution which will pay them to do so. The universities, and particularly the provincial ones, should, I think, administer such funds; and as soon as practicable those who have benefited should help to choose future recipients. This brings me to Question 1. I think the three hundred pounds offered for one year by the Atlantic Awards is an admirable basic sum (it is, I believe, free of income tax). It is enough for various forms of existence, including, I venture to think, married life and possibly a fairly small child. £300 a year, however, still entails worry in the background; I think a youngish writer (i.e. younger than 35) can live fairly happily on £800 to £1,000 a year.

6. I am quite content with my own 'solution'. I have a good deal of advice to offer. For writers without a private income, it is advisable to face the process of a possibly slow *conversion* to a position where they have to make fewer and fewer concessions for the sake of money: i.e. it is advisable for them to put up with the more reputable forms of hack-work till they need no longer do so. When they can, they should drop hack-work like hot bricks, however easy it has become. In any case, they should be very chary of the implications of each *kind* of hack-work: specifically, and without frivolity, I would advise all young writers not to take on regular novel-reviewing. It is one of the most exacting and lowering jobs in the world.

And poets: the poet must (but above all secretly) think of

himself as a potential Shakespeare, *and not less than this*; he will rarely find difficulty in excusing to himself his occasional failures. He must manage his relations with his novelist-colleagues very carefully. The novelist is always kind to the poet, but the income-difference is always there. How true it is that every novelist would prefer to have been a poet I am not sure; I rather doubt it. At any rate the poet feels among novelists like a poor tolerated relative who has the good looks of the family but nothing else. Try to avoid a stab of anger and jealousy at the thought that even a good novelist earns about fifty times as much from his novels as you do from your poetry. Finally, no writer should live too far below his income; avoid cheap or irregular meals; and if he stays on after a party, he should try to insist on a proper bed, not the floor or the sofa.

### JOHN RUSSELL

All true writers exist in the hope of creating a masterpiece. This fact must be the central chimney and warming flue of their lives, and all other activities are, in the last resort, merely ways of buying the time which they need for their best work. All such writers write ultimately for themselves, and in obedience to inner canons of perfection; vanity, want and lust are potent local stimulants, but to the central impulse we must acribe, if hesitantly, a certain absolute, moral grandeur. This quality is held by modern society in organized disrespect; and nobody needs telling that, although good work occasionally meets with a copious financial reward, it does so only by luck or accident. Writers need, therefore, some auxiliary limb or iron lung, if they are to make a living. This can be acquired within their own field; for although few people live by literature, a great many live off it; and a life, for instance, of desultory writing for periodicals must now exert a great charm. Most other employments for young men offer a crushing load of work and a nugatory initial reward. Herbert's rectory, Stendhal's consulate and Pater's fellowship at Brasenose seem gone for ever, and leisure, even purposeful leisure, is difficult to secure. As against this, good writing will always be rare, and will always be sought after; for the first five or ten years an aspirant with unusual or acceptable talent will earn, with relative ease, as much in this way as would be paid to him during his first years in diplomacy, at the bar, or in any learned profession.

He will see himself at a bound among those whom he had hitherto regarded as Delphic arbiters of taste and judgement. His way of life is itself delightful; he can stroll up from the country on Tuesday afternoon; he need never be early for breakfast or late for the theatre; he can pass a normal life in society—or, if he wishes, a fruitfully abnormal one. Spring migrations are his for the asking; and on wet November mornings he can spare a glance, from his study window, for the dutiful bowlers of his friends as they splash along towards Whitehall.

In twenty years, however, his memory and ear will have been debauched by the habit of rapid composition to order; he will have lost the power of disinterested reading; his income will not have increased, though his commitments may well have trebled. He will never have dared to take a sabbatical year of travel and rearmament, for fear of that Tartar horde so vividly evoked by Sir Max Beerbohm—‘younger men, with months of work before them’. His habits of mind will be known to the last twitch, and editors will dread his fixed grin or unvarying scowl. Most galling of all, he will see his beastly, dull contemporaries soar high above him; collocations of letters will hang to the tails of these comets; K.C.B., P.C., K.C.M.G., K.C., he will read. And as the junior Ministers move from N.W.3 to S.W.1, they will quietly drop him, and forbid their children to play with his. Illness will beggar him, and in perhaps another twenty years they will get him put on the Civil List, at forty pounds a year.

Writers are born, of course, with all their preservative instincts in a state of exceptional strength and tenacity. Most horny and tusky is this vital part of their being, and enclosed in a protective belt of Asian guile. Sublimest of spongers, the Duinese elegist has shown how the highest ambitions of the spirit need not exclude a deft and rapacious instinct for comfortable living; and I have heard it said, perhaps in envy or malice, that among our ranks long-sighted legacy-hunters and successful stalkers of rich wives occur in unusually high proportion. Be that as it may, I believe that the only serious enemies of a writer’s best work are within himself; all outward obstacles can be overcome, and many may even do useful service as goads and challengers; and the advice or suggestions of others count ultimately for little. Most writers work, in Aubrey’s phrase, ‘as boars piss—scilicet, in jerks’, and it is for the weeks and months of creative idleness that they and

their patrons have to plan; but it would be difficult to convince any legislature of the realism of this view. Our task should rather be to improve the quality of the audience, and in this to begin with ourselves; it is arguable that, though the number of readers (or rather, of persons able to read) must be many times greater than at any other period in literary history, the informed audience has never, in proportion, been smaller. The State also has its duty here; for now that writers cannot hope to find the indulgent patrons or the commodious sinecures by which at one time they might have hoped to tide over their years of fasting and preparation, there is surely a case for the temporary endowment of at least a few young writers, and a stronger one for the protection of those who, in middle or later life, deserve better than indigence. If a small tax were levied upon all lending libraries, and the proceeds given to the Civil List, this might at last become a roll of honour, and its benefits be enlarged to the level of a decent subsistence.

### EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST

Another interrogatory! As if writers hadn't enough to do to keep their heads above water! But I see I have already begun to answer your questions, so I may as well go on.

The amount of income a writer needs to live on must, I should have thought, differ according to the kind of work he does. If he is a journalist with a family living in a town, he will need a lot more money than a novelist living alone in the country. But even then, what does 'need' mean? Some writers can be happy living very simply; others actually need what some would call superfluities—pictures, gramophone records, travel, lovers—to enable them to do their work properly. What appears to me certain is that a basic ration of *unearned* increment is essential to a 'serious' writer—so that he can afford to turn down hackwork that will fritter away his time, and not to be obliged to hurry his work, and even to lie fallow for a year or so if he feels the necessity of it. The only way a writer can earn a sufficient income today is by driving his quill as hard as it will go and harder, regardless of the results to his style, his taste and his sensibility.

There is no such thing as a 'suitable second occupation' for a writer—except in the sense that writing books on philosophy was a suitable second occupation for the late Lord Balfour.

Serious writing is a whole-time job, and a very hard one, too. When a writer takes to regular pot-boiling, his work is bound to suffer sooner or later. (Those who think this doesn't matter are unfit to live in a civilized country.)

Your fourth question is less easy to answer. Of course nearly all writers must accumulate a certain capital of emotional and practical experience. In some cases this has to be replenished from time to time, in others not. But—at any rate when first youth is over—any employment that continues to absorb most of the would-be writer's energy can hardly fail to sap his creative vitality and will quite soon destroy it altogether. On the other hand there are, of course, all kinds of daily chores and interests which, far from diverting a writer's energy, nourish and promote it.

I certainly do not think the State a good substitute for the private patron of past times. In theory the State may have all the right intentions towards artists, but in practice its patronage is bound to be far too rigid, since the 'benevolence' is entrusted to little men in ivory offices, who either fear to carry out their instructions in a liberal and imaginative way, or else interpret them according to ignorant personal prejudice. Look at the way Shostakovitch has been ruined by the dogmatism of the Soviet regime. Subsidiary institutions (university colleges, publishing houses) are an improvement in this respect, but even they tend to upset the situation by insisting on too quick a return for their money. In this connection it is worth recalling the case of Robert Bridges who, during his tenure of the laureateship, wrote practically no occasional verse at all; devoting all his energies to the completion of *The Testament of Beauty*. Which, in the circumstances, was exactly as it should be.

Am I 'satisfied with my own solution of the problem'? Of course I am not! If I were, I shouldn't be wasting my time answering your questionnaire: I should have chucked it into the waste-paper basket and gone on working at the novel which I ought to have started long ago, had the demon of journalism not got me by the throat. Rightly or wrongly, I consider myself as first and last an imaginative writer who is forced, by the pressure of present-day English life, to fritter away the years in purely ephemeral activities.

My advice to the young writer? First: cajole, bully or blackmail your parents, guardians or whatever, into giving you an

independent income just large enough to keep the wolf from the door. Time—quite a short time—will show whether or not you have the root of the matter in you. If it becomes clear to yourself, as well as to others, that you have not, then will be time enough to take to some sort of hackwork.

One final word: don't begin by reviewing other people's books. Many—even most—young writers think this the easiest way of starting on the career of letters. In fact, it is among the most difficult of all literary undertakings. While your lyrical faculty lasts (and it is unlikely to last as long as you imagine), write novels and poetry; there will always be time for criticism later on, when middle age has cooled your imagination, and deepened and sharpened your judgement. You can write several good novels, and even more good poetry, with next to no experience of life; but criticism is essentially the business of maturity.

### *WILLIAM SANSOM*

1. At the present cost of living, I should say a minimum of £400 to £500 a year—this to obtain privacy and a certain mobility, but not to support a family or remove pressure-forming anxieties as to the future. But averages are difficult to suppose: a writer, I expect, is usually in some way not normal—and according to his character might prepare his best work in restrictive or normally unsavoury conditions. Prisons, gardens, slums, society, have all produced literature. Perhaps the most reasonable average desideratum would be some comfortably private ivorite tower with the habit (and even the necessity) of frequent sorties therefrom.

2. At the moment, with luck, yes. Provided his output is regular, and he is to some extent established. But he must necessarily risk the complete failure of experiments.

3. No commercial writing. However limited this sphere may be, there is the temptation to excel within the rules of the game and the creative cells are sapped. Manual work is probably the best alternative, though this only rarely could bring in sufficient extra income. Perhaps the usual—one of the quieter Civil Services, if they exist any more? Teaching? Librarian? Somewhere are to be found individually suitable libraries and lighthouses. But again these are severely personal choices: it is always possible, for instance, that a metropolitan mind isolated with a gross of

mixed stuffed stoats in a small museum, not a hundred miles from Hadrian's Wall, might at some time begin rather to pity itself.

4. Any fresh experience can provide its stimulation. But if the writer feels imprisoned, he is likely to spend all his effort in dreaming himself free. A state of free leisure is the really important condition. In degree, the enrichment of experience must be accompanied by enough privacy and leisure to absorb and record it.

5. There is the chance always of a decline into directed State inspiration—but this should be risked. Patronage from any source is invaluable. It is wrong to assume that strings are attached to every generosity, right to marvel that fairly disinterested good does exist at all in the human arena.

6. Yes. Over a period of years I decided to save, and did. These savings gave me the chance to live and write freely for a couple of years. (Since, I have been so fortunate as to receive a bursary; this naturally has further eased matters, removed further the temptation of a salaried job.) So I suppose any advice I could give would be save, save, save. If you can. Modest living, if you can bear it, discovers a greater interest in simple things, and reduces the headache of desire. And any accumulating money develops a fair feeling of security, and thus a freer mind.

### *D. S. SAVAGE*

So many social, cultural and religious issues are raised by the question of the writer's economic position that it is impossible to deal with them in a small compass. The position of the 'clerisy' is determined by the distribution of wealth/power/privilege and by the cultural standards obtaining in society. Wealth in our racketeering society is distributed, to put it mildly, unjustly; and our cultural standards are debased. I am dead against the theory which, raising the banner of 'the artist', would make of writers a privileged élite existing in æsthetic detachment from, and yet actual dependence upon, an enslaved and militarized people.

How much does a writer need to live on? What sort of a writer; what are his responsibilities, liabilities? But it's quite useless to discuss this matter in general terms. For myself, I am not interested in earning a living by writing. I am interested in writing. Also, I have to earn a living for myself and my family—if only to be able to continue writing. In fact, I've never yet

been able to earn the barest living for the five of us out of the rewards of authorship. I have been compelled to improvise, taking up one ill-paying job or occupation after another in the vain hope of eventually getting into a position in which I should have the more leisure and mental ease to read, think, write, in accordance with my irrepressible urge to those activities. My employments and my writing have each hindered success in the other.

There is no precise answer to Question 3. Question 4 raises the point of the relationship of writing to living. In the daily struggle which is my life I am brought up against the brute facts of human existence; through experience I get to know them, to comprehend something of the very structure of existence. This knowledge is inevitably reflected in my writing at the same time as the necessity for coming to terms with the material conditions of living puts a practical obstacle in my way as a writer. Naturally I'd like the obstacle removed—in which event the struggle would be transposed elsewhere.

I am cynical about State support for writers. I don't give a damn for the State either way. No, I'm not satisfied; in fact I haven't a solution. And I'm not a bit interested in the fate of people, young or old, who merely 'wish to earn their living by writing'. I am interested only in those who wish 'to write', and not even, very much, in all of those.

But I admit it's a problem, and the question still remains, what, under existing bad conditions, can be done to take some of the obstacles out of the way of serious writers (always remembering that there are degrees of 'seriousness') so that they can get on with the job? I have often wondered why, under the conditions of a capitalist society, no collective action has been taken to improve the writer's position—why it is that there is apparently no intermediate stage for the writer between that of outcast and celebrity, and how it is the celebrity shows so complete an unconcern with the tribulations of the outcast. If anything practical is to be done (and whatever is done is bound to be unsatisfactory), rather than State interference I should recommend the setting up of a commission by, say, the Society of Authors, to investigate the economic position of writers—particularly young writers—and to institute a fund for the purpose of making grants for needy writers to proceed with specific works of literary value. This fund, within the unwholesome conditions of a competitive

economy, might well be swollen by some diversion of the proceeds from out-of-copyright works of dead authors, period of copyright being extended by law for this specific purpose, while celebrated writers, as well as publishers and other middle-men who profit from literature in one way and another, might be bullied and shamed into making substantial regular contributions to the fund. This would be used not merely for making direct cash grants but for financing one or more journals of a solid character which would provide a market for serious work, in much the same way as some American Universities support and finance independent quarterlies. An authors' publishing corporation, even, might be developed, co-operatively run and setting an example to the commercial publishing houses in its concern for the welfare of writers and for literary standards.

### STEPHEN SPENDER

1. Of course, what a writer needs depends on many things, such as his age, whether he is married, etc. The one impregnable position is readiness to make every economic sacrifice to his vocation and, if necessary, to involve everyone round him in such sacrifice. But very few writers can do this. Allowing for travel and occasional treats, I should say an unmarried writer needs £500 or £600 a year (free of tax), if he lives in London. A married writer, if he makes his wife his cook, needs £700. However, if he has children, if he does not wish his wife to be a domestic slave and if he has any social life, he needs £1,000 a year or more.

Directly he needs as much as this, difficulties of income tax arise, for he needs actually to earn £1,500 a year. Writing is a social occupation and in London he will find that entertaining is one of his chief expenses. If he were a business man, the government would pay for his lunches with his colleagues, but as he is an artist, entertainment of other writers will not be recognized as a legitimate expense of his profession.

2. Try to earn £1,000 a year or more from writing today and see what happens. If you write books your publisher will not have paper to print more than 5,000 copies, which will bring you in £250 to £350. This means you must either write four to six books a year, or you must turn to journalism. Assuming you are paid, on the average, £3 3s. for 1,000 words, you will have to write

333,000 words a year to gain £1,000. Myself, I find that if I write three or four articles a week (a) I become irritable, (b) I get into a condition in which I find it very difficult to read seriously, (c) least of all can I read what I write myself. I can write an article far more easily than I can bear to read it, for the purpose of proof correcting, (d) there follows a general disgust with my own ideas, my way of thinking and talking, and (e) a tendency to write more and more journalism and less poetry, because I feel unworthy to write serious work.

3. I can only state the problems in general terms. These are (a) to avoid expressing merely in words on a level which lowers one's standards, (b) to avoid exhausting oneself physically and/or mentally, (c) to avoid becoming absorbed in some task which eventually becomes more important to one than one's writing, (d) to avoid being forced to play some role in life—such as an official or a pedagogue or an important person—which usurps one's creative personality.

The safest part for a writer to play in a job is a return to childhood. Do some job which enables one to learn something which will be useful in writing. Accept the fact that one is once again the stupidest boy in the class, the backward son in the family. One's best relationship with one's colleagues is for them to think of one as slightly mad but full of good will. Be a cog and allow oneself to be gently ground between the heads of departments. Reassure people by allowing them to think that one is distinguished without one's ever menacing their own position. For God's sake never be in a position of responsibility and have no ambitions. Do not seek honours and do not refuse them. One should aim at being a rather superior and privileged office clown who excites no one's envy, and on whom one's colleagues project a few fantasies. One encourages all this by arriving always a little late (but not too late). Prepare for the worst, when the boss shows you his (or his wife's or his son's) poems. Pretend to like them, ask for a testimonial and resign immediately when this happens.

4. This depends entirely on the quantity of the writer's energy. If he has the energy to do another job and to write, I cannot help thinking that his writing gains by a contact with the machinery of ordinary life. A scientist, a managerial leader or a statesman who realizes an idea which has to pass through the whole machinery of a modern organization, is creative in a

way parallel to an artist who overcomes technical problems in order to state an idea in his particular medium. If one can retain the sense of a creative attitude in one's environment and not be crushed by a routine, one will learn much from ordinary work. Myself, I think that the best and most serious modern literature suffers from unworldliness. Literature should be made of the same worldly muck as are the historic plays of Shakespeare, the courtly drama of Racine and of Lopez de Vega, the materialistic novels of Balzac and the Duchy of Parma in *La Chartreuse de Parme*. Byron was the last worldly poet. What we want is a fusion of Byron and Blake.

5. Only in the way of recognizing and protecting the writer's professional position, by providing paper for modern books, giving creative writers the travel facilities of journalists, allowing the social contacts of writers with their colleagues to count as tax-free business expenses, etc.

6. At the moment I am happy because I work with an intelligent and sympathetic international group of people who, not being English, expect of me what I can give, do not make me feel guilty and have an unobtrusive recognition of my value in their work and also in my own which has a certain value for them.

I am not unpatriotic, but I fear that the mainspring of English industriousness is a sense of guilt and for this reason the position of writers who have to work for their living in this country is particularly difficult. They are forced into the dilemma of feeling they have to choose between two kinds of work. In France, this is not so, with the result that many French writers combine official positions with writing.

I advise the young writer to be perfectly honest with himself about the all-important problem of how he is expending his energy. The only rule in this work is to know what you want to do and do it, at all costs. If you can do other things as well, you will probably gain by it. But if you can't, you're *foutu*.

### DYLAN THOMAS

1. He needs as much money as he wants to spend. It is after his housing, his feeding, his warming, his clothing, the nursing of and looking after his children, etc., have been seen to—and these should be seen to by the State—that he really needs money to spend on all the luxurious necessities. Or, it is then that he doesn't

need money because he can do without those necessary luxuries. How much money depends, quite obviously, on how much he wants to buy. I *want* a lot, but whether I *need* what I want is another question.

2. A serious writer (I suppose by this you mean a good writer, who might be comic) can earn enough money by writing seriously, or comically, if his appetites, social and sensual, are very small. If those appetites are big or biggish, he cannot earn, by writing what he wishes to write, enough to satisfy them. So he has to earn money in another way: by writing what he doesn't want to write, or by having quite another job.

3. It's no good, I suppose, saying that I know a couple of good writers who are happy writing, for a living, what they don't particularly want to write, and also a few good writers who are happy (always qualified by words I'm not going to use now) being bank clerks, Civil Servants, etc. I can't say how a writer can make money most suitably. It depends on how much money he wants and on how much he wants it and on what he is willing to do to get it. I myself get about a quarter of the money I want by writing what I don't want to write and at the same time trying to, and often succeeding in, enjoying it. Shadily living by one's literary wits is as good a way of making too little money as any other, so long as, all the time you are writing B.B.C. and film scripts, reviews, etc., you aren't thinking, sincerely, that this work is depriving the world of a great poem or a great story. Great, or at any rate very good, poems and stories do get written in spite of the fact that the writers of them spend much of their waking time doing entirely different things. And even a poet like Yeats, who was made by patronage financially safe so that he need write and think nothing but poetry, *had*, voluntarily, to give himself a secondary job: that of philosopher, mystic, crank, quack.

4. No, to both questions. It neither suffers nor is it enriched. Poems, for instance, are pieces of hard craftsmanship made interesting to craftsmen in the same job, by the work put into them, and made interesting to everybody, which includes those craftsmen, by divine accidents: however taut, inevitably in order, a good poem may appear, it must be so constructed that it is wide open, at any second, to receive the accidental miracle which makes a work of craftsmanship a work of art.

5. The State should do no more for writers than it should do for any other person who lives in it. The State should give shelter, food, warmth, etc., whether the person works for the State or not. Choice of work, and the money that comes from it should then be free for that man; what work, what money, is his own bother.

6. Yes and No, or *vice versa*. My advice to young people who wish to earn their living by writing is: DO.

## HERMANN HESSE

### A LIFE IN BRIEF<sup>1</sup>

DURING the early post-war years I made two attempts to give a kind of summary bird's-eye view of my life for the benefit of my friends, to whom at that time I had become somewhat of a problem; they were written in fairy-tale form and in a semi-humoristic vein. The first of these remained a mere fragment, 'The Magician's Childhood'; the second was a venture, in the manner of Jean Paul, to forecast my future. It was entitled 'A Conjectural Biography' and appeared in the *Neue Rundschau* in Berlin in 1925. In the present story this has been subjected to only a few unimportant corrections—it had been my intention for several years to unite both works in some way, but until now I had been unable to find a suitable means of reconciling the two that are so different in tone and mood.

I WAS born towards the end of the Modern Age—shortly before the world started to slip back into the Middle Ages—under the sign of Sagittarius, with a favourable aspect of Jupiter. My birth took place in the early evening of a warm July day, and the temperature of that hour is something that I have sought and loved unconsciously all my life, and which when absent I have felt to be painfully lacking. I could never bear living in cold countries, and all my voluntary journeys have been towards the South. I was a child of pious parents whom I loved tenderly, and whom I should have loved even more tenderly had they not made me acquainted too early in life with the Fourth Commandment. Unfortunately commandments have always had a

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fatal effect upon me, however just and well-meaning they may have been; I who am by nature as docile as a lamb and pliant as a soap-bubble have, even from earliest youth, deliberately set my face against commandments of any kind. I had only to hear the words 'Thou shalt not' for everything that was in me to rise up in revolt, and for me to become stubborn and intractable. It is easy to understand that this peculiarity had a very disadvantageous effect upon my school years. Our masters taught us, in that amusing branch of study which they called World History, that the world had always been ruled, guided and changed by men who had broken with the laws of their ancestors and had made their own laws, and we were told that these men were worthy of reverence. Only this was just as much of a lie as all their remaining teachings, for if one of us, whether with good or evil intent, ventured to show courage and protest against some commandment, foolish custom or convention, he was neither revered nor held up as an example, but was punished, ridiculed and repressed by the cowardly authority of the teacher.

Fortunately I had already learnt the most important and valuable things in life before going to school. I had fine, alert and delicate senses, upon which I could rely and from which I could draw much enjoyment; and even if at a later date I was to fall incurably under the allurement of metaphysics, and may at times have mortified and neglected my senses, it is the atmosphere of a tenderly developed sensuousness in matters of sight and hearing that has remained constant and true to me and plays a living part in the world of my thoughts, even when they appear to be abstract. I had therefore a certain equipment for life, which as I have already mentioned I had acquired before my school years. I was familiar with the ins and outs of our town, the chicken-yard, the woods and the workshops of the craftsmen; I knew the trees, birds and butterflies; I could sing songs and whistle through my teeth, and much beside that makes life worth while. To this, of course, must be added the knowledge obtained at school that came easily to me and amused me: for example, I took a real pleasure in the Latin tongue, and composed Latin as well as German verses at a very early age. For the art of lying and diplomacy I must thank my second year at school, when a tutor and a junior master put me in possession of this faculty after I had brought

down upon myself one misfortune after another as a result of my childish frankness and candour. Both these teachers clearly and successfully enlightened me of the fact that honesty and the love of truth were not characteristics that they looked for in their pupils. They blamed me for a misdemeanour—quite a trivial one—that had taken place in the classroom, of which I was completely innocent, and as they could not bring me to admit that I was the culprit a veritable state-trial ensued. They whipped and tortured me; but far from wringing from me the desired confession, they succeeded only in scourging out of me any belief I may have had in the propriety of the teaching profession. In the course of time, thank goodness, I came to know teachers who were just and worthy of respect, but the damage was done: not only my relationship with my schoolmasters but with authority as a whole was falsified and embittered. Generally speaking I was a good scholar during the first seven or eight years of my schooldays—at least I was always among the first pupils in my class. Only when that conflict began—which no one who is destined to be a personality is spared—did I become more and more at odds with the school. Some twenty years later I was to understand the full significance of those struggles, but at the time they were very real and all-embracing, and brought me, much against my desire, the greatest unhappiness.

The fact was that I wanted to be a poet—a poet and nothing else. From my thirteenth year onwards I was quite clear in this conviction. But gradually I became aware of another painful fact: it was possible to become a teacher, a parson, a doctor, a craftsman, tradesman or post office official, also a musician, painter or architect, for towards every vocation in the world there led a path, there were preliminaries, a school, a course of study for the beginner; but for the poet there was nothing. It was permissible and even an honour to be a poet—that is to say a well-known and successful poet, but unfortunately in the majority of cases one was by that time already dead—but to *become* one, that was impossible; to *wish* to become one a farce and a scandal, as I soon learned. I quickly absorbed all there was to know of the situation. A poet was something one must be, not something one should try to become; furthermore, an interest in poetry and individual poetic talent made one suspect to the teachers, and in consequence one was either distrusted, ridiculed or even grossly

insulted. The poet, at one with the hero and with all strong, beautiful, courageous and unusual figures and efforts was magnificent in the past, and every schoolbook sings his praises; but in the present and in reality he was hated—and presumably the teachers were appointed and trained expressly to prevent the development of free and complete human beings, and the possibility of great and noble deeds being performed.

I saw nothing but an abyss stretching between myself and my far-off goal, everything became uncertain and devalued and only one fact remained constant: I wished to become a poet whether it were difficult or easy, whether it were laughable or laudable. The external consequences of this decision—in fact this curse—were as follows.

At the age of thirteen, when the struggle had already begun, my conduct left so much to be desired both at home and at school that I was banished to a grammar school in another town. A year later I became a pupil in a theological seminary, where I learned the Hebrew alphabet and came near to grasping the significance of the Dagesch *forte implicitum*; when suddenly the storm broke. It welled up from within and completely engulfed me, leading to my flight from the monastery school, to punishment with rigid detention, and finally to my expulsion from the seminary.

For a while I took pains to advance my studies in a college, but there, too, detention and dismissal were my lot. For three days I became a tradesman's apprentice, ran away once more, and for several days and nights caused my parents great anxiety by my disappearance. For six months I helped my father, and then for a year and a half I was taken on as a probationer in a mechanical workshop and turret-clock factory.

In short, for more than four whole years everything I did that was required of me went awry, no school would keep me, and I could hold no apprenticeship for any length of time. Every attempt to make a useful citizen of me failed, often with shame and scandal, flight or dismissal. And yet it was generally admitted that I was talented and even that my intentions were honest. In addition to this I was always passably diligent—I have always admired the high virtue of idleness with awe, but have never been an adept in the art. At the age of fifteen, after I had failed at school, I began consciously and energetically to educate myself; it was fortunate, and proved a source of constant joy to me, that there was in my father's house a huge ancestral library, a whole roomful of old

books, which contained among other treasures the entire German poetry and philosophy of the eighteenth century. Between my sixteenth and twentieth years, not only did I cover reams of paper with my own poetic efforts, but during those years I read half the classic literature of the world as well as the history of art, and studied languages and philosophy with a tenacity that would have been amply sufficient for a normal school course.

Then I became a bookseller in order at last to be able to earn my own living. In any case, I had much more in common with books than with the vices and cast-iron cog-wheels that had tormented me so much as a mechanic. At first this plunge into the new and newest literature was an almost intoxicating pleasure, but I soon realized that spiritually life in the mere present is insupportable and senseless, and that a spiritual life is made possible only by a steadfast relationship with the past, with history and with the old and age-old. So, after my preliminary pleasure had been exhausted, I felt a need to revert from this spate of modernity to the ancient, and I accomplished this by transferring to an antiquarian bookseller. I remained faithful to this vocation, however, only so long as I needed it to earn my own living. At the age of twenty-six, as a result of my first literary success, I gave this up as well.

And so at last, after many storms and sacrifices, my goal was reached. I had, incredible as it seemed, become a poet, and had apparently won in my long tough struggle with the world. The bitterness of my school and adolescent years, to which I often so nearly succumbed, was now laughed at and forgotten; relations and friends, who had previously despised of me, now smiled amicably. I had won. Now my stupidest and most worthless actions were found enchanting—and I too was extremely enchanted with myself. I noticed for the first time in what abominable loneliness, asceticism and danger I had lived for so many years; the warm air of recognition did me good, and I began to be a contented man.

For a good while my outward life followed a calm and pleasant course. I had a wife, children, and a house with a garden. I wrote my books and was esteemed as an amiable poet, and I lived at peace with the world. In 1905 I helped to found a periodical which was directed primarily against the personal government of Vilhelm II, without however taking these political aims too

seriously. I travelled extensively in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy and India. Everything seemed to be in order.

Then came the summer of 1914, and both internally and externally everything took on a different aspect. It appeared that our former prosperity had been based on unsure foundations, and that now a period of adversity, that great Educator, was beginning. The so-called Heroic Age had dawned, and I cannot say that it struck me as being any better equipped, worthier or more heroic than all the others. The one thing that made me different from most of my fellow men was that I was lacking in that great consolation that so many of them seemed to possess—enthusiasm. I was brought violently back to earth, and found myself once again in conflict with myself and the outside world; I had to return to school for a second time, I had once again to unlearn the contentment I had felt with myself and my fellows, and with this experience cross over the threshold of initiation into life. I have never forgotten a trifling experience that happened to me during the first year of the war: I was on a visit to a large military hospital, where I was trying to enrol as a volunteer and to adapt myself intelligently to this changed world. It then still seemed to me possible. In that hospital for the wounded I met an old spinster who had been in good circumstances before the war, and who was now doing her duty as a nurse. She told me with touching enthusiasm how glad she was that she had been allowed to live through this Heroic Age. I found this comprehensible, because for this lady it had required a war to make her change her lazy and selfish elderly spinsterhood for an active and worthier life. But as she informed me of her good fortune in a corridor full of bandaged and mutilated soldiers, which ran between wards filled to overflowing with the disabled and the dying, my heart turned right over; and yet, although I understood this good woman's enthusiasm so completely, I could neither share it nor approve of it. If ten wounded soldiers were needed to bring happiness to each enthusiastic hospital nurse, then the price was far too high.

No, I could not share in the joy over the Heroic Age. From the very beginning I suffered miserably under the war, and defended myself desperately year after year against a misfortune that seemed to have fallen from outside and from out of a clear sky, while all around me the world behaved as though it were enchanted by this misfortune. And when in the newspapers I read

articles by writers who purported to have discovered the blessings of war, the exhortations of the professors, and all the war-poems from the studios of famous poets, I was even more wretched.

One day in 1915 I let slip an admission of this misery in public, and added a word of regret that even the so-called men of the spirit found nothing better to do than to preach hatred, spread falsehoods and hold the great misfortune in high esteem. The result of this modestly outspoken regret was that I was declared a traitor to my country in the newspapers—a new experience for me, for, despite several clashes with the Press, I had never yet been in the position of one who is spat upon by the majority. The article which contained this particular indictment appeared in twenty different papers in Germany, and of all the friends I thought I had among the journalists, only two dared to speak on my behalf. Old friends informed me that they had nursed a viper in their bosoms, and that their hearts no longer beat for me, the degenerate, but for the Kaiser and their Country. Anonymous letters of abuse came in their hundreds, and booksellers let me know that an author with such subversive views no longer interested them. I became acquainted for the first time with a pretty little ornament with which many of these letters were adorned: it was a little round stamp bearing the inscription ‘Gott strafe England’. One might have thought that I laughed heartily at this lack of understanding on their part, but I could not bring myself to do so. This experience, in itself so unimportant, brought about the second great transformation of my life.

It will be remembered that the first change occurred at the moment when I consciously made the decision to become a poet. The former model pupil Hesse had from then on become a bad scholar, had been punished and thrown out, could do nothing right, and had caused himself and his parents care upon care—and all this only because he could see no possible reconciliation between the world as it was, or seemed to be, and the voice of his own heart. This repeated itself anew during the war years. Once again I saw myself in conflict with the world in which I had hitherto lived in peace. Once again everything failed me, I was alone and wretched, and all that I said and did met with misunderstanding and hostility. Again I saw a hopeless abyss yawning between reality and that which to me seemed desirable, reasonable and good.

But this time I was not spared a heart-searching. It was not long

before I found that I would have to look within myself for the source of my suffering and not in the outside world, for I saw clearly that no man or God, let alone I, had the right to accuse the whole world of madness and brutality. There must therefore have been some disorder within myself that had brought me into conflict with the world: and in truth there did exist a great disorder. It was by no means a pleasant task to come to grips with it and try to achieve some reintegration. One thing was quite certain: my former good relations with the world had not only been too dearly bought but had become as hollow as the peace of the outside world. I had thought, by reason of the long and difficult struggles of my youth, to have earned my place in society, and at last to have become a poet, but in the meantime success and prosperity had had their usual influence upon me, and I had become contented and complacent—and when I looked closely, as a writer I was hardly distinguishable from the popular light novelist. I had become too prosperous, and now that adversity, which is always a hard and energetic school, had brought its host of cares, I learnt more and more to let the affairs of the world take their own course and to busy myself with my own part in the chaos and guilt of the whole. I must leave it to my readers to study the effects of this preoccupation in my writings. Yet I always nourished the secret hope that in time my people too—not as a whole, but perhaps large numbers of aware and responsible individuals among them—would undertake a similar scrutiny of themselves, and that instead of laments and abuse against the evil war, the evil enemy and the evil revolution, the questions would be raised in a thousand hearts: how am I personally responsible, and how can I free myself from guilt? For innocence can always be recaptured when one recognizes one's sorrow and guilt, and suffers to the end instead of searching for the guilt in others.

As this new change began to appear in my life and writings, many of my friends shook their heads, many of them also forsook me. But all that belonged to the changed image of my life—just as the loss of my house, my family and other possessions and comforts. This was a period of daily farewells, and every day I was astonished that I could suffer it all and still live, that I could still love anything in this strange life that seemed to bring nothing but pain, disappointment and loss.

However, I must add that even during the war years I had something in the nature of a good star or a guardian angel. Although I felt very much alone in my suffering, and up to the beginning of my transformation found my fate a perpetually unhappy and undesirable one, this very suffering and my distracted state served as a protection and armour against the outside world. I spent the war years in such an abysmal environment of politics, espionage, corruption and opportunism as even in those times it would have been difficult to find in many parts of the world in so concentrated a form. Actually it was in Berne, the centre of German, neutral and enemy diplomacy, a town that overnight had become over-populated with diplomats, political agents, spies, journalists, speculators and profiteers. I lived among diplomats and soldiers, and associated with men of many and often enemy nations, and the air around me was a veritable network of espionage and counter-espionage, informing, intrigues, political and private activities—and of all this during those years I noticed absolutely nothing! I was pumped, informed against and spied upon, was suspected, alternately by the enemy, the neutrals and my own countrymen; and noticed nothing at all. Only long afterwards did I learn some of the details for the first time, and could not understand how I had managed to survive untouched and undamaged in this atmosphere—but it had been so.

With the end of the war my transformation was complete: my ordeal of self-scrutiny had reached its peak. My sufferings had nothing more to do with the war or the fate of the world at large, nor did the thought of Germany's defeat, which we abroad had foreseen for the past two years with certainty, hold any further terrors. I was sunk completely within myself and in my own destiny, but I had the impression at times that I was grappling with the fate of Man as a whole. I found mirrored within myself all war, all the blood lust of the world, all the irresponsibility, coarse sensationalism and cowardice of Man. I had first to lose my self-respect, and then my self-contempt . . . and finally nothing remained but to plumb the depths of Chaos in the hope, alternately rising and falling, of rediscovering nature and innocence once more beyond. Every aware and truly enlightened man—it would be a sheer waste of effort to speak of the others—at one time or another takes this narrow path through the wilderness.

Sometimes when friends abandoned me I felt a certain grief,

but never discomfort. I looked upon their estrangement as a substantiation of my chosen path. These former friends were quite right when they affirmed that previously I had been a sympathetic poet and human being, whereas now, in my present problematical phase, I was simply intolerable. On questions of taste and character I had by this time advanced to a point where there was no one among them to whom my language was intelligible. Their reproaches were probably justified when they told me that my writings had lost their beauty and harmony. Such statements only made me laugh, for what is beauty or harmony to a man who is condemned to death, or who is running for his life from beneath collapsing walls? Perhaps, contrary to my lifelong belief, I was not a poet at all, and the whole of my aesthetic activity had been a mistake. Why not indeed? But even that was no longer of any importance.

Most of that in which I had come to believe during my infernal journey had proved worthless and a fraud, including perhaps my frenzied belief in my vocation and talents. Yet how insignificant that was now. What I had once envisaged with conceit and childish joy as my mission in life was no longer there. I saw my task—or rather my way of salvation—no longer in the realms of lyrical poetry or philosophy, or any other similar specialized art form, but only in allowing that little that was truly vital and strong in me to live its life, only in absolute fidelity towards that which I still felt living within me. That was life, that was God. Later, when such times of high and perilous tension are over, everything looks strangely different, because the erstwhile contents and their nomenclature become meaningless, and that which was holy yesterday may sound almost ludicrous today.

As, in the spring of 1919, the war at last came to an end for me too, I retired to a remote corner of Switzerland and became a hermit. Because all my life (and this was a legacy from my parents and grandparents) I had been deeply engrossed in the wisdom of the Indians and the Chinese, and because I partly expressed my new experiences in Oriental metaphor, I was frequently referred to as a 'Buddhist'; but at this I could only laugh, because I knew in my heart that no one could be further removed from that belief than myself. And yet there was a grain of truth in it, as I was to learn later. If it were somehow

conceivable that a man might choose his own religion, I know that I personally, due to my innermost yearnings, should have chosen a conservative one—such as Confucianism, Brahmanism, or the Catholic Church. I should have made this choice out of a desire for the antithesis and not because of an innate affinity, for it was only by chance that I was born the son of pious Protestants: I am a Protestant by nature and disposition (hence my great antipathy to modern Protestantism shows no contradiction). The true Protestant defends himself against his own Church and others alike, for his nature accepts more easily the ‘becoming’ than the ‘being’; in this sense Buddha too was a Protestant. My belief in my craft and in the value of my literary work had been uprooted since my transformation, and writing no longer gave me any real pleasure. But a man must have some pleasure, and even in my most miserable periods I made this demand. I could renounce justice, reason, the supposed meaning of life and the world—for I have seen that the world comes through magnificently without the aid of these abstractions—but I could not renounce a little joy; and this longing was now one of those small flames within me in which I still believed, and out of which I thought to build my life anew. I often sought pleasure, dreams and forgetfulness in a flask of wine, which often enough brought me solace, and I was duly grateful. But it was not enough. Then one day I discovered a brand new joy: at the age of forty I began to paint. Not that I presumed to be a painter or wished to become one, but painting is wonderful recreation and makes one happier and more patient. From then on my fingers were not only black from ink, but red and blue. Many of my friends were angered afresh by this new manifestation. In this I am always unlucky; whenever I undertake something essential, happy and beautiful, people invariably become unpleasant. They would like one always to remain the same and never alter one’s face; but my face rebels and often wants to change. It is a vital need.

Another reproach they levelled at me I also found to be quite just: they accused me of lacking in a sense of reality. Neither my writings nor my paintings do in actual fact conform to reality, and when I compose I often forget all the things that an educated reader demands of a good book—and above all I am lacking in a true *respect* for reality. I consider it to be something one should trouble least about, for it is ever present and burdensome enough,

while there are other more important and beautiful things to call for our care and attention. Reality is something with which no one under any circumstances can ever be content, something which should never be adored and revered, for it is the hazard and refuse of life. And this shabby, constantly disappointing and barren reality is impossible to change except by a denial of it and by showing that we are the stronger.

In my poems, then, the normal respect for reality is often absent, and when I paint my trees have faces and the houses laugh, dance or weep—and generally it is difficult to recognize the tree for a pear or a chestnut. Yes, I must submit to this reproach. I confess that my own life often appears exactly like a fairy tale, and I often feel and see the outside world in perfect harmony and accord with my inner feelings—which I can only call magic.

Sometimes I committed stupid blunders. For example, I once made a harmless statement about the famous German writer Schiller, whereupon a number of South German bowling clubs declared that I was a profaner of national shrines. But happily for years now I have succeeded in refraining from making any more utterances that are likely to desecrate holy relics and make men scarlet with anger. I see in this some progress. And because so-called reality no longer plays a very great part in my life, because I am often as full of the past as the present, events of today already seem to me endlessly remote, and I can no longer distinguish the future from the past as clearly as most people do. I live a great deal in the future—and so I have no need to bring my biography to a close with the present day, but may safely let it proceed. . . .

I will now relate in short the full span of my life.

During the years up to 1930 I wrote a few more books, finally to turn my back on this profession for ever. The question as to whether I was to be reckoned a poet or not was taken up by two industrious young men and used in their theses for their doctorates. But the question remained unanswered. A careful observation of the newer literature revealed that the stuff that goes to make a poet had, in modern times, shown itself in such an extraordinarily diluted form that the difference between the poet and the literary man could no longer be determined. From this objective analysis the two candidates came to diametrically opposed conclusions. The first, rather more sympathetic, was of the opinion that such

ridiculously triturated poetry was not entitled to the name and was valueless as literature; that which was called poetry today might just as well be allowed to die a peaceful death. The other was a confirmed admirer of poetry, even in its most rarefied forms, and considered that it was better to allow, out of caution, a hundred non-poets to be accounted as poets than to be unjust to one who still had perhaps a single drop of true Parnassian blood in his veins.

My chief occupations were my painting and the study of Chinese methods of magic, but during the years that followed I became more and more absorbed in music. It was my ambition in later life to write a kind of opera wherein human life in its so-called reality would be taken far from seriously and even held up to ridicule; it would instead be made to shine out in its eternal value as an image—as the fugitive garment of Divinity. The magical conception of life has always been near to me: I had never become a modern man, and had always found Hoffmann's *Golden Vessel* and even *Henry of Ofterdingen* to be more valuable text books than all the world's history and natural history books; the latter, whenever I read them, had always seemed to me like so many charming fables. But now I had reached a period of life when it was senseless to build up and elaborate any further an already complete and sufficiently differentiated personality, when my task lay rather in allowing my precious ego to sink once more into the world, and to bring it into line, in the light of the transitory, with the eternal and changeless orders. To express these thoughts or life moods seemed possible only through the medium of the fairy tale, and I saw in the opera the highest form of the fairy tale—presumably because I could no longer truly believe in the magic of words in our misused and dying language, whereas music appeared to me as a living tree upon whose branches Hesperidean apples could still grow. I wished to achieve in my opera what I had not entirely succeeded in doing in my poems: to give an exalting and charming sense to human life. I wished to extol the innocence and inexhaustibility of nature, and to depict its course to the point where it would be compelled through inevitable suffering to turn to the spirit, the far off opposite pole, to portray the oscillation of life between the two poles of nature and the spirit with all the serenity, glitter and perfection of the rainbow's arch.

Unfortunately, I did not succeed in finishing this opera; it suffered much the same fate as my poetry. I had felt obliged to give up writing poetry when I realized that everything which seemed to me important to say had been said already in *The Golden Vessel* and *Henry of Ofterdingen* a thousand times better than I could have said it. And so it went this way with my opera, too. No sooner had I completed my year-long musical studies, written one or two preliminary scores, and tried to visualize as penetratingly as possible the actual sense and content of my work, than I suddenly perceived that my opera was likewise nothing more than a striving to say what had already been said magnificently in *The Magic Flute*.

So I laid this work aside, and turned my full attention to the practice of magic. If my artist's dream had been an illusion, and if I were not capable of producing a *Golden Vessel* or a *Magic Flute*, then I was born to be a magician. I had advanced sufficiently along the Eastern Way of Laotse and in the I Ching to know for certain the hazardous nature and commutability of so-called reality. I now compelled this reality to conform to my conceptions of it through magic—and I must say I was overjoyed at the results. I must also admit that I did not always limit myself to that enchanted garden which is known as White Magic, for from time to time I drew the small living flames within me over towards the Black Art.

When I was well over seventy, and just when I had been awarded the twin distinction of honorary degrees by two Universities, I was brought before the judges on a charge of seducing a young girl through the instrument of magic. In prison I asked permission to busy myself with my paints, and this request was granted. Friends brought me in colours and artist's materials, and I painted a miniature landscape on the walls of my cell. Once again I had turned to art, and all the shipwrecks I had previously experienced as an artist did not prevent me from draining once more this most exquisite beaker, from once again refreshing my heart and building a small but beloved toy world like some child at play, from once again putting aside all wisdom and abstraction in favour of the primitive joy of creation. So I painted again, mixed my colours and dipped my brush, tasting once more the rapture of all this infinite magic: the gay light ring of vermillion, the pure full tone of yellow, the deep emotion of blue, and the



The Mysterious Rose Garden  
From 'The Yellow Book', vol. IV

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Britannia à la Beardsley, by E. T. Reed  
(By our 'Yellow' decadent)

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The Fourth Tableau of 'Das Rheingold'

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The Three Musicians

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harmony of their mixture culminating in the palest of greys. Happy and childlike I indulged in my game of creation and painted a landscape on the cell wall; it contained all that in which I had found pleasure during my life—rivers, mountains, sea and clouds, peasants at harvest time, and a mass of lovely things that I had enjoyed. A miniature railway ran through the centre of the picture; it led up the side of a mountain and the train, whose engine had already disappeared into the mountain-side, looked for all the world like a worm in an apple; it was just entering a small tunnel from whose mouth issued clouds of woolly black smoke.

Never before had a game brought me so much pleasure. I quite forgot, in this return to my art, that I was a prisoner and an accused man—and that there was really little hope of my ending my life anywhere else but in this cell. I even forgot about my magical exercises, for I seemed to be sorcerer enough when I painted dwarf trees or a small bright cloud with my fine brush.

In the meantime so-called reality, with which I was now completely at variance, did its level best to destroy and ridicule my dream. Nearly every day I was led out under guard into the most dismal offices where, amidst a host of papers, sat unsympathetic men who questioned me, were unwilling to believe me, snapped at me and treated me alternately like a three-year-old child and a hardened criminal. You do not necessarily have to be an accused person to become acquainted with this remarkable and truly hellish world of bureaucracy: you need only desire to change your address, to get married, procure an identity card or a passport to be obliged to descend into this hell and waste hours in the musty rooms of this world of papers. Of all the infernos that man in his strangeness has devised for himself this has always appeared to me to be the most diabolical. You will be questioned, barked at by bored, impatient and joyless men who disbelieve your simplest and truest statement, and you will be treated either as a schoolchild or a criminal. But all this is common knowledge. I should long since have been suffocated and have withered right away had not my colours time and again consoled me, and had not my picture—my beautiful miniature landscape—brought me renewed life and a breath of fresh air.

One day I was standing before my picture when the warders appeared with their usual wearisome summons, wishing to tear me away from my pleasant occupation. I felt a sense of fatigue,

and almost a revulsion against all this activity—against the whole of this brutal and soulless reality. The time now seemed ripe to make an end of it all: if I were not allowed to play my innocent artist's game in peace, I must resort to that more serious art to which I had devoted so many years of my life. This world was unbearable without magic.

Recalling my Chinese ritual, I stood for a while with my breath held, and slowly released myself from the illusion of reality. I begged the warders in a friendly tone to be patient for a moment while I climbed into my little train in the picture, as there was something there that I had to attend to. They laughed in their usual manner—for they looked upon me as mentally deranged.

I made myself small, climbed into my little train, and drove it deep into the tunnel. For a short while the woolly smoke could be seen pouring from the round hole in the mountain; and then it slowly evaporated and with it the whole picture, myself included.

'The warders stared at the blank wall in the utmost embarrassment.

[Translated by MERVYN SAVILL]

## ROBIN IRONSIDE

## AUBREY BEARDSLEY

WHEN we read in *Under the Hill* how the Abbé Fanfreluche 'stood doubtfully for a moment beneath the ombre gateway of the mysterious Hill . . . at taper-time' in suave anticipation, as it turns out, of admission to the court of Helen, whose favourite ladies are made known to us by such titles as La Zambinella and Pappelarde, it is impossible to suppress a shadow of sympathy with the attitude of the writer who, under the pseudonym of Max Mereboom, ridiculed in *Punch* the art of Daubaway Weirdsley. Beardsley's unfinished romantic *nouvelle*, as he might have called it, has many painful phrases; the affectations in his published letters, the use of 'touchant' for 'touching', of the adverb 'vastly' or of the epithet 'simply too, too' embarrass us today; and even in his drawings our appreciation is apt to be interrupted by a vulgarity of affectation which has no sanction

beyond its special appeal to the so-called 'decadent' artistic circles of the early 'nineties. His illustrations to the *Rape of the Lock* are almost too, too *dix-huitième* for unquestioning enjoyment, those for *Salomé* too japonesque; and it was not, probably, the impulse of a colourist that led him to propose that he should tint the drawings for *Lysistrata* in pale mauve. The defect in his art that arose from the subjection of his taste to literary and artistic fashion cannot be dismissed as superficial. There is every likelihood, even a certainty, that he would have outgrown it, had he lived; but it was present in nearly everything he did up to a few months before his death in March 1898, at the age of twenty-six. It tainted the evident conviction of such an intimate act as his conversion to Rome; the lives of the Saints, including so many records of extreme *poseurs*, had enthralled his fancy from boyhood, and the tapers, the incense, the music of Catholicism were as congenial to his senses as they were to those of Wilde or Dowson. The Roman tendencies that prevailed among the London intelligentsia of the 'nineties, stimulated both by the adornments of the visible Church and by the spiritual comfort that Catholicism offered to any penitent advocates of the naughtiness in which the epoch delighted, have a flavour of vanity and emotional chic compared with which the most unctuous puerilities of the great Verlaine are as palatable as they are well meant.

Unhappily the culture of the 'nineties produced among us no manifestation of Symbolism, either in poetry or painting, on the wonderful level to which the movement rose in France. The rude, corporate vigour of the New English Art Club, busying itself with *pleinairism* under what amounted to the misapprehension that it might thus inject the native school with a tonic of the newest French compounding, was beginning, to the exclusion of more imaginative, less broadly acceptable, forces, to dominate the progress of independent art. Within the limits that the operations of the Club may be considered as a whole, it borrowed back from France what the French had already borrowed from Constable and Turner. Our *Æsthetic Movement* was more surely killed by Newlyn, Glasgow and the London Impressionists than by any propaganda from such recognized organs of contemporary philistinism as *Punch* or *The Times*; its powers of resistance, however, were fatally

weakened by the early deaths of Beardsley, Dowson, Crackanthorpe and Conder, and by the untimely end of Wilde's career. British impressionism survived, strengthened by the subsequent loss of Gore and Gilman, and has today entered upon a third childhood—'Post-Impressionism' having proved a fiction that was powerless to stem its longevity. Until recently, English painters and art critics, even when they admired, have commonly misunderstood both the qualities and the historical significance of the modern French School. Ruskin ignored it; the painters of the New English imitated its secondary masters; Roger Fry and his followers forced a gospel of form from the art of Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh, whom they considered as the joint masters of their 'Post-Impressionism'; and, even at the height of the *Aesthetic Movement*, with all its reverence for French civilization, we find Beardsley looking forward to a meeting with Henner and Roll.

As the victim mainly of circumstance, the *Aesthetic Movement* was short-lived and valetudinarian. Such as it was, Beardsley epitomized it, and his art, despite the contemporary affectations he was unable to overcome, embodies a force and a specific expression which compels us to reckon with, to pierce the pretensions which are its outward and sometimes ludicrous vesture. Beardsley's authentic poetic energy was not manifest in his art only. We do not have to reconcile the strength of his best drawings with the conceits of *Under the Hill*, the paradoxes à la mode of his recorded table-talk or with the nice sentiments of a neophyte as he has expressed them in the otherwise affecting *Last Letters*. The productive drive, the earnestness of purpose, are clear enough in the early correspondence with A. W. King,<sup>1</sup> his schoolmaster at Brighton, and in many of the letters to Leonard Smithers; and one would quote the testimony of his friends as further evidence of his seriousness, if their records were not largely modified by being also memorials. It is in a letter to King, written at the age of nineteen, that Beardsley describes the encounter with Burne-Jones, whose art was the first important influence on his development. It is worth quoting, in part, for its untutored charm and the eagerness it displays: 'Yesterday, (Sunday) I and my Sister went to see the Studio of

<sup>1</sup> Published in *An Aubrey Beardsley Lecture* by A. W. King, with an Introduction and Notes by R. A. Walker. R. A. Walker, Bedford Park, London, 1924.

Burne-Jones; as I had heard that admittance might be gained to see the pictures by sending in one's visiting card. When we arrived however we were told that the Studio had not been open for some years and that we could not see Mr. Burne-Jones without special appointment. So we left somewhat disconsolately.

'I had hardly turned the corner when I heard a quick Step behind me, and a voice which said "Pray come back I couldn't think of letting you go away without seeing the Pictures, after a journey on a hot day like this". The voice was that of Burne-Jones; who escorted us back to his house & took us into the Studio, Showing & explaining everything. His kindness was wonderful as We were perfect Strangers he not even knowing our names.'

'By the merest Chance [one suspects the element of chance] I happened to have some of my best drawings with me, & I asked him to look at them & give me his opinion.'

'I can tell you it was an exciting moment when he first opened my portfolio & looked at the first drawings. . . .' Burne-Jones concluded his opinion (in Beardsley's words) thus: '*I seldom or never advise anyone to take up art as a profession, but in your case I can do nothing else.*' 'And all this', adds Beardsley, 'from the greatest living artist in Europe.' The brother and sister were then given tea on the lawn, where they met the Oscar Wildes ('charming people'), who drove them home. Beardsley was at this time employed as an insurance clerk with no immediate practical hope of living by his drawing. King was the only friend who had persistently encouraged him to hope at all in that direction, and had been, as far as he was able, his patron, from the moment he overheard him on his first day at Brighton Grammar School (*aet.* fourteen) lecturing the other boys on the relative merits of the tragedies, comedies and histories of Shakespeare, though it was found later that he knew no multiplication tables, describing them as unnecessary 'so long as you could count money and, more important still, had it to count'. Yet though, at this time, Beardsley was fettered to an office and the first signs of tuberculosis made it almost impossible for him to draw much out of hours, and though a visit to Watts met with a rebuff in pontifical terms (as hypocritical and more pathetic than the worst affectations of 'aestheticism' at its height) and another to Morris was met only with ill-temper, the miraculous expedition to the Burne-Jones studio was characteristic of the rapid success

that Beardsley achieved—only less rapid than the progress of his art from one manner to another—from his nineteenth year onwards.

The good opinion of Burne-Jones persuaded Beardsley to cultivate whole-heartedly the conventions of that decorative style, evolved by Burne-Jones from Rossetti's example, which expressed the first phase, in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties, of the *Æsthetic Movement*. In 1892 he received a commission, through Frederick Evans, the bookseller, to illustrate the *Morte d'Arthur* for J. M. Dent, then a young publisher. Beardsley left his office and threw himself into the work with that obstinate determination to make a name for himself which goaded him throughout his life. Of the smaller designs for the book, he made as many as twenty in a day. There is nothing in their quality to provoke surprise at their rate of production. The book was intended to rival the publications of the Kelmscott Press and it did so because a large issue at a reasonable price made it widely available. Beardsley's drawings were remarkable for a youth. But they are an artistic failure. The ponderous graces of the Kelmscott style—notably the Burne-Jones briar-rose *motif*—are lavishly used, but the beauty, for example, of the Kelmscott Chaucer dwells in its laboured elaborations of linear pattern and Beardsley's natural aptitude for rendering a decorative effect by spacing, and the careful disposition of emphases impoverished the idiom in which Burne-Jones and Morris were at home. As the book shows, Beardsley had progressed, before its completion, from the Pre-Raphaelite tradition to the newer Japanese mode. His tributes to this vogue culminated in the drawings for Wilde's *Salome*; the thorns have been replaced by peacock feathers, and the frieze-like compositions have given way to that studied *inattendu* of design which may be a merit of the best Japanese art and is certainly a monotonous feature of the worst, and it was the worst with which Beardsley was principally acquainted. The theme of *Salome*, however, was one which was not only agreeable to the latest intellectual fashions, which Beardsley was concerned to dominate, but had also, as interpreted by Wilde, an emotional flavour to which the artist was instinctively sympathetic. The portentous conception *Enter Herodias* is a strong indication of his swiftly developing mastery.

In 1894, the first volume of the *Yellow Book* was published

by John Lane with Beardsley as art editor. This was the manifesto, and for a short time continued to be the organ of those æsthetes whose appreciations, stimulated by the imported taste of Whistler, extended beyond the medievalism of the ageing doyens of the *Æsthetic Movement* to the gallantries of French eighteenth-century art and, with more fervour but much vagueness, to the Symbolists and Realists of the contemporary French School then, attractively as it seemed, known together as 'Decadents'. The magazine, profiting by the craze for culture that, at the moment of its appearance, was the unprecedented and ever-to-be-regretted fad of London Society, caused a popular sensation of which the details are familiar. London 'turned yellow in a night' and in the morning Beardsley had achieved the celebrity he required. The permanent value of the *Yellow Book* was slight, but in its pages Beardsley's art reached a further stage, one in which he advertised, instead of following, the fluctuations of informed taste and one in which characteristics of his private vision were expressed with increasing subtlety. He had refined and corrected the unreliable influence of Japanese design by a study of Greek vase paintings in the British Museum. The result, in such *Yellow Book* drawings as *Night Piece*, *L'Education Sentimentale* and *Lady Gold's Escort*, is an art (owing much also to Whistler), of which profile, combined with elegantly disposed, flat areas of black and white, is the formal basis. The exaggerated elegance of these drawings, not only in handling but also in the spare choice of accessories, is at once the discreet garment and, by the extremity of its discretion, the exposure of the shocking inelegancies of which, there is no doubt, *Lady Gold* or the temporary *promeneuse solitaire* of *Night Piece* would be capable between the leaves of a clandestine issue. The deplorable repercussions of the Wilde case led to Beardsley's unwarrantable dismissal from his post on the staff of the *Yellow Book*. The magazine was unable to survive the loss and it was shortly succeeded by *The Savoy*, published, with Beardsley again as art editor, by the dubious, debauched, amiable Leonard Smithers, who thereafter held Beardsley's art in fee at the really munificent rate of twenty-five pounds a week, a rate which was not maintained, but which never, though Smithers' financial arrangements deteriorated as he grew older, dwindled to nothing. Beardsley's *Savoy* period roughly coincided with the full bloom of his eighteenth-century

enthusiasms. The illustrated fragment of *Under the Hill* appeared in its columns and it was for Smithers that Beardsley made the drawings for *The Rape of the Lock*. The refinements of boudoir life, rococo toilet tables, powder puffs and hand mirrors, the structural complications of eighteenth-century costume, provided a rich opportunity for that marriage of impeccable delicacy of form with gross indelicacy of feeling that was a peculiar force, sometimes a vehemence, of Beardsley's art. But ornamental discretion was cast aside; accessories were multiplied, and if we can withstand the discovery, in examining the works of this period, of quaint *pots pourris*, flowered muffs and diapered band-boxes, we must respond to the general effect of variegation, intricacy and even colour that Beardsley's nervous and laborious pen is able to convey; and we shall occasionally be delighted by an original fancy such as the long fan worn by one of the *Fruit Bearers* as though it were a sword, or the lectern used as a music-stand by the dwarf in *The Toilet of Helen*. Even the test of *Under the Hill*, a product of the same enthusiasm, provides the recompense of a few surprising images, women wearing false moustaches dyed in purple and bright green, or the ever-open eyes of moths 'burning and bursting with a mesh of veins'.

Beardsley was by this time a dying man. Fully aware of the peril in which he lived, suffering from recurrent haemorrhage followed by periods of great weakness, he had at his command an urgency in enterprise, a biological industry, which drove him to more exacting endeavours as his life languished. He continued, in almost heroic fashion, to cling to fame, and his later letters to Smithers are full of tragic appeals to his publisher to announce the appearance of illustrated works which he must have had doubts of ever completing. It was suitable that his conversion to Catholicism deflected his taste from the eighteenth to the seventeenth century, and it is certain that this orientation would have bestowed a gravity, even a nobility, upon his art, merits which are rare in his accomplished work. His last major project was a set of illustrations for *Volpone*; he only lived to finish a frontispiece and five initials, the least flippant things he ever made. They are essays in a new style and cannot be compared with the one or two perfect drawings of the *Yellow Book* and *Savoy* periods, but, though the emotional emphasis is similar, there is a baroque *morbidezza* in the conception suggesting a mind that has

pondered the vanities of the flesh and holds them in awe. This promise of a further enlargement of Beardsley's art was unrelated to any general movement of critical interest in the intellectual circles of London. It was the promise of an unfulfilled liberation from such relationships. These were, however, the prop and the servants of his inspiration as we necessarily know it; and Robert Ross has pointed out the comprehensive and comprehending nature of Beardsley's response to cultural fashion. The taste of the 'nineties, with all its charming contradictions, was mirrored, proclaimed and sometimes redeemed by Beardsley's drawings. This is especially so in the case of the eighteenth-century works, which surpass the essays of Conder and Steer in the same line; and the current reverence for French 'Decadence', which as far as the visual arts were concerned, was understood by nobody, assumed a unique form in Beardsley's *Yellow Book* drawings and occasional posters which, whether consciously or not, reveal a fine affinity with Lautrec. Among Beardsley's many favourite books, a list of which would summarize the literary taste of the day, were the *Romaunt of the Rose* and *Sidonia the Sorceress*—a bequest of the Burne-Jones hegemony, Pater's *Renaissance*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Voltaire's *Mélanges Littéraires*; he was also both a Wagnerite and an admirer of Gluck. For the Laclos and the Gautier he projected and began a series of illustrations, and drawings for the *Rheingold* appeared in *The Savoy*.

Beardsley has regularly been praised as a superb craftsman. In fact, his method was that which most amateurs instinctively employ. A professional craftsman—and craftsmanship should be regarded as a profession—would be under no necessity continually to erase his drawing before getting it right; and if he were also an artist, and therefore unlikely to be always content with first drafts, he would not incur the risk of damaging his paper by repeated rubbings and scratchings, but would prefer to make various studies and transfer the chosen drawing to a clean sheet. Beardsley never made preliminary drawings; the pencil lines on his paper were sometimes so numerous and so embroiled that at the moment of inking in he failed to recall, if the inspiration was not still with him, the particular contour he had decided to use; at other times, his erasures were so repetitive that they pierced the paper. He was an artist of exceptional gifts, and the

technique he employed, with all its risks, was the safeguard of these gifts; it enabled him to preserve the fruits of concentration or chance, the instructions of his Muse, which might otherwise have vanished under his untrained hand in the course of transference, by copying or even tracing, on to a fresh surface. He loved exquisite finish, but there was nothing of the craftsman's systematic, acquired acumen in his method. The effective use of pencil for modelling within the outline, which he developed (notably in the *Volpone* initials) at the very end of his life was not the experiment of a craftsman, but naturally followed a recognition of the comparative limitations of pen drawing — a recognition which would have been forced upon him by suggestive accidents of the pencil which could not be inked in and had, therefore, to be rubbed out. The real technical interest of Beardsley's art arises from his readiness to work for reproduction by process-engraving and to bear in mind its peculiar advantages. There is still too much fuss and snobbery about the hand engraving techniques; their æsthetic qualities have barely survived their disuse as reproductive methods; and artists might well be encouraged to study more closely the specialities of mechanical processes today. 'Finish,' however, is certainly one of the obtrusive qualities of Beardsley's art, not the finish of legibility or adequate representation (his more complex drawings have no immediate clarity of subject and he was apparently indifferent to the accident of representing a figure with two left hands), but the finish that results from the melodious fulfilment, of some linear rhythm or from the tonal or atonal harmonies that may be produced by the painstaking disposition and variation of darks and lights. All his work shows this self-conscious deliberation in the choice of a line that must flow even if it should fail to describe or suggest, or of a shape that must be graceful whatever may be the normal features of the natural object of which it is the image. The *Rheingold* drawing, reproduced here, has, as an illustration for music, an apt rhythmical vividness, as if the flames about Loge were so many staccato phrases, preluding the measured, rising cadence of the figure behind him.

But this decorative excellence is not necessarily, as in the *Rheingold* drawings, also interpretative; and, by itself, it is no key to the potent charm that is generated by familiarity with Beardsley's art, the forms and ceremonies of which, adopted by

every luxury illustrator for a generation after his death, are still carried out by fading acolytes and no longer distract our attention from the sentiments they may serve to express. Beardsley's inspiration was erotic before it was decorative, and it is as an altar, irreproachably graven, to the erotic ambitions of the period—as he intensely experienced them—that his art preserves its idiosyncratic spirit. Whatever the degree of formalization, the abstract elements in his work may be seen to be the shrine of a breathing Eros. Nothing is unequivocally known, or what is so known has not been revealed, of the artist's own erotic life. There is a natural tendency in the families and friends of those whose names seem likely to pass into history to withhold information on this subject, or worse, to produce the information in a watered form with the reasonable expectation that their version, as the utterance of the dearest or the nearest to the illustrious dead, will command the full authority of a respectable historical source. This tendency attained in England towards the end of the last century editorial heights which might have been openly assaulted by biographers if—to cite a restraint that can never have been widely accepted—continence outside the marriage bed had not been at the time a moral convention whose infringement, however freely sanctioned or discussed, was not a proper topic for the annalists of celebrated lives who were often the widows or the children of their subjects. If personal jealousies or shames were going to cloud the truth of their records, they had done better to leave the task altogether to the impartial researches of posterity. Today it is generally agreed that the nature of sexual impulses exerts a substantial influence upon the character and work of individuals; evidence of the most outlandish erotic habits could provoke no intelligent depreciation of Swinburne as a poet or of Watts as a painter; but it would, while enlarging our knowledge of them as men, illumine our understanding of the springs of their inspiration; the art of Rimbaud or of Gauguin is more profound and clear because we know them *tels qu'ils furent*. Further discussion of this point would be a mere labouring of the obvious truth that biography is one of the materials of criticism. As soon as there has ceased to be a danger of insulting the privacy of any living person, enlightenment can be the only result of disclosing the facts, however scandalous, of the intimate life of historical personalities.

We may particularly deplore our ignorance of the events—if there were any—in the sexual life of an artist whose works are the proof of an imagination possessed by speculation upon the more subtle as also upon the grosser possibilities of physical passion. It seems certain that Beardsley's brief existence was starred by no romantic attachment; and it is possible that the frailty of his bodily condition restricted, though it did not forbid, the satisfactions of sexual intercourse. On the other hand, the theory that those natures who display an ostentatious interest in sexual matters are those whose experience in this field is smallest, a theory that might encourage the opinion that the eroticism of Beardsley's art was the consequence of frustration, is not one for which supporting evidence is easy to provide. It would be obvious, moreover, from Beardsley's correspondence—if the libidinous character of the circle in which he moved was not by itself a sufficient indication—that he was aware of the many occasions for indulgence with which London and Paris solicited the libertine of the 'nineties. We may deduce with some assurance that he took advantage of these opportunities; the familiarity and the tolerance with which his art and, less pervasively, his correspondence allude to the professional exploitation of the more hermetic vices leaves little room for doubt. Beardsley's violent hostility to Wilde, dating from the time of the trial, has been supposed to show that the artist's eroticism was exempt from the taint of perversion or at least that his tolerance did not extend to those who were addicted to perverted practices. But no special psychological powers are required to realize that in fact this hostility was the expression of anxiety and not of any inherent abhorrence of Wilde's abnormality. Beardsley was dismissed, at the time of Wilde's arrest, from the staff of the *Yellow Book* on grounds that included the pusillanimous one that irresponsible gossip was linking his name with that of the accused; the expulsion was a painful shock and a professional setback, and he was not the only man who was driven by anxiety, which, in this case, was also wisdom, to renounce any association, real or imaginary, with the victim of the scandal. Though Wilde's special sexual tastes were certainly not especially Beardsley's, we may again refer to the world of the drawings, to the presence among its inhabitants of depraved androgynous persons, for evidence of a fascinated interest in the

erotic theme which transcended—or was too base to realize—any conceivable distinctions, least of all an invidious distinction, between the normal and the perverted; it was an interest only qualifiable in general by an eager preference for the sexually bizarre, at whatever sacrifice of such tastes as may instinctively have been the artist's own.

The published fragment of *Under the Hill* is a printable version of the pornographic romance that was privately issued by Leonard Smithers in 1907. This, called *The Story of Tannhäuser and Venus*, differs principally from the published story (the title of which is an allusion to the Mons Veneris) by the addition of the pornographic conclusion to each chapter necessarily omitted from *Under the Hill*. The unexpurgated story, though it was to end with Tannhäuser's disillusioned withdrawal from the delights of the Venusberg, must dispose of any obstinate notion that Beardsley accepted certain forms of licence and rejected others.<sup>1</sup> Its value is as a key to the suggestive or mysteriously disturbing features in the drawings; it more than confirms, in unambiguous but absurd language, our extreme suspicions of the excesses of which the Abbé in the illustration to *Under the Hill* might be capable; it degrades Helen in more ways than even the advised sweetness of her appearance in the second illustration seems to invite; and it proves that the delicate attendants of Salome are able and ready to accomplish feats of which, in the drawings, only their eyes and what Beardsley would have called their massive 'chevelure' are the pledge. The story in itself has no merits beyond those that an exacting connoisseur would require of that dubious channel of near-literature to which its theme is confined and whence, with no more success than the rapidly written *Gamiani*, it presumes in vain to emerge in spite of the care that Beardsley spent upon its composition—the same care, incited by the same inspiration, that he bestowed with such beautiful, reticent results upon his drawing. From the *Salome* illustrations onwards, an erotic overtone is the artistic virtue of his best designs. His most expressive 'creations'—to borrow a term from an applied art that Beardsley respected—are cut so that we can mentally undress the models; the fall of the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. Gallatin (*Aubrey Beardsley*. The Grolier Club, New York, 1945) has recorded that in the original manuscript of *Under the Hill*, the hero (l'Abbé Fanfreluche of the published version) appears as l'Abbé Aubrey.

garments is often such that the attention is held—whether the model be a Dieppe bathing girl or wanton Pierrot—by details of anatomy that are obscured under ordinary clothes. The characters of these curiously bedight persons vary with the period of art and literature in which the artist with any amount of anachronistic embellishment may place them, but they all remain involved in the fabrication of those artificial tempers and situations that a master of the erotic 'art' is able to contrive with no regard for the emotions aroused or for the potential reality of the trumped-up circumstance beyond the transient function such factors may fulfil in ministering to the excitements of physical satisfaction. Beardsley's duennas would be capable of celebrating a black mass with apparent conviction, though with no other intention than as the setting of a licentious party; even the cruel presence of his Herodias suggests an effective mask, as if she had assumed the guise of ferocity for voluptuous purposes, confident that there would be esoteric spirits about who would answer its erotic appeal; and the lovers in the drawings for *The Three Musicians* seem to have chosen one another to test the delights of love between an undersized boy and a giantess. This effect in Beardsley's art of the subservience of all passions and activities to a single end of the vanity of which he was convinced—with what purity or depth of faith we may be permitted to inquire—preserves intact the brittle substance of its artistic validity. It is produced with an exactness and an unproven assurance that provokes a fascinated sympathy with the vision, so cynical, so susceptible and, for long, so adolescent of its author, so that we learn with delight that the seduction scene in *The Mysterious Rose Garden* was conceived as an Annunciation; for the Archangel Raphael, the role of *intrigant* was the only possible one in this amorous world; after such an expedition he must have returned from earth to heaven with the words 'Et in Arcadia Ego' on his lips, and we may detect a not-so-distorted reflection of his features in the frock-coated Satan in Arcady of one of the artist's later drawings.

## SELECTED NOTICE

*En Lisant Dickens.* Alain. 1945. Gallimard.

IT is nearly a century since Taine, in an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, introduced Charles Dickens as a new and exciting writer to the reading world of Paris. His appreciation gave immense pleasure to an author to whom it was a new experience to be written about seriously instead of being picked to pieces by anonymous reviewers. How much or how little Dickens has been read in France since Taine's day I do not know, but recently a book, *En Lisant Dickens*, has been published over the name of the well-known French critic M. Alain. It reveals him as a life-long reader of the Dickens novels each of which conveys to him something of the mystery of London, a mystery he has never tried personally to explore. In this book we find him passing the novels in review and ruminating on the worlds within worlds which they disclose. He marvels at the fierceness and intensity of spirit shown by 'Boz', and at the fearless way he 'pierces the crust' of contemporary life, but then no writer knew better than Dickens that below the jolly, joking, guzzling, happy-go-lucky existence of his time there yawned an emptiness into which people were terrified of falling. Beneath the solidity of the Veneerings, the sumptuousness of the Merdles and even the dignity of the Dedlocks, there was just nothing but unsatisfied hearts, aimless functioning, and equally aimless pursuit.

The Dickens atmosphere, which is like none other created by man, strikes M. Alain as caused quite as much by the exhalations of the inhabitants of London as by the fogs and river murk. So impregnated are the houses with human living that they seem almost like the secretions of those who dwell in them. Indeed they are as intimately bound up with their occupants as the mollusc with its shell. In some moods M. Alain feels Dickens to be the only magician in the romance-world; in others that there can be but one England, that of Dickens. He says, '*Je voudrais que l'on considérât la lecture de Dickens comme une initiation à la vie anglaise. Jamais l'art n'a été plus près de nous montrer, comme dans un microscope, la physiologie d'un peuple.*'

I believe it to be essential to the understanding of the novels to integrate them with Dickens's personal life and period. M. Alain's studies are unintegrated literary appraisals of the sort that many reviewers delight in. To me, criticism of this kind, and some of G. K. Chesterton's prefaces are cases in point, usually tends to be unrewarding because it takes little or no cognisance of background or of the author's actual experience. M. Alain's book, however, is rewarding, for though he may know as little about Dickens's passage through the world as Taine, he is an acute critic and has discovered in *Pickwick* (read in translation) something that no English critic has ever done, he has found that 'the most brilliant pages of the *Papers* are absolutely in the style of Voltaire'. How, he inquires, could this have come about? Perhaps I can supply the answer. It is that Dickens read Voltaire. *Candide* and the plays were among his favourite books and in that capacity accompanied him when he went to settle in Genoa. They were held up by the Italian Customs and he was in a state of fuss until he had rescued them.

Apart from *The Pickwick Papers*, M. Alain's greatest admiration goes out to *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*. He likes to think that much of *Dombey and Son* was written in Paris and he descants on the autobiographical novels, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, of which he prefers the former. He once asked a friend of his, a good critic, why descriptions by X. never came off. The friend's reply was, 'But X. took notes'. 'It is memory alone', concludes M. Alain, 'that can be trusted to find the proper poetry of description,' and that is why he finds *David Copperfield* carrying him off his feet 'like a poem'. Memory he conceives of as essentially aesthetic, for memory can evoke sentiment, and sentiment passion and power. Dickens could never force himself to keep records of any kind; they seemed to cork down all creative exhilaration. In M. Alain's book we find a possible explanation of his distaste.

UNA POPE-HENNESSY

#### CORRECTION

We regret that the reference to *Juan Gris: His Life, His Work and His Writings* in the August number was incorrect. The book is being published in this country by Percy Lund Humphries Ltd., as well as by Curt Valentin of New York, but it is unlikely to be ready before early 1947.

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